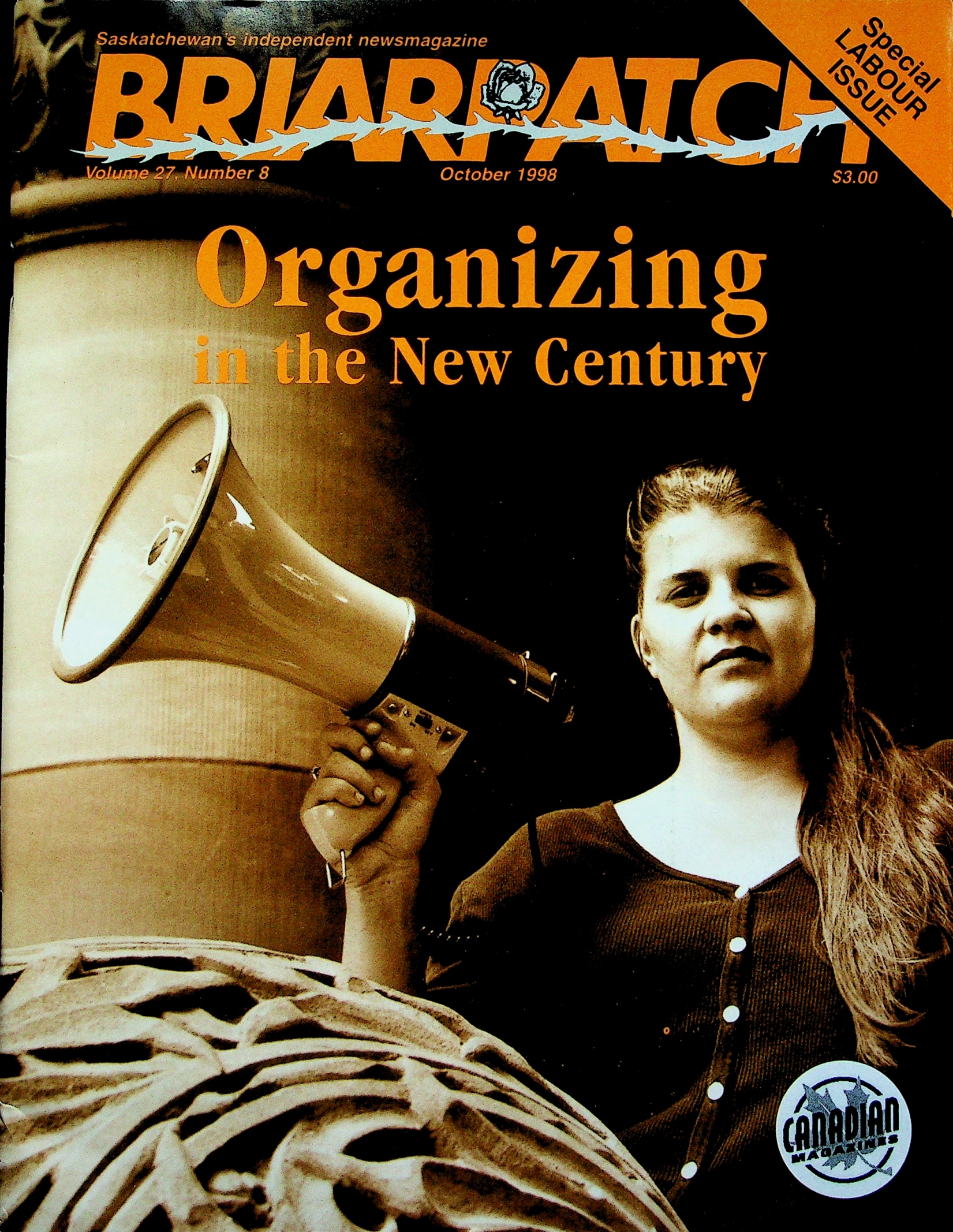
Saskatchewan's independent newsmagazine

BRIARPATCH

Special LABOUR ISSUE

Volume 27, Number 8 October 1998 $3.00

Organizing in the New Century



CANADIAN MAGAZINE

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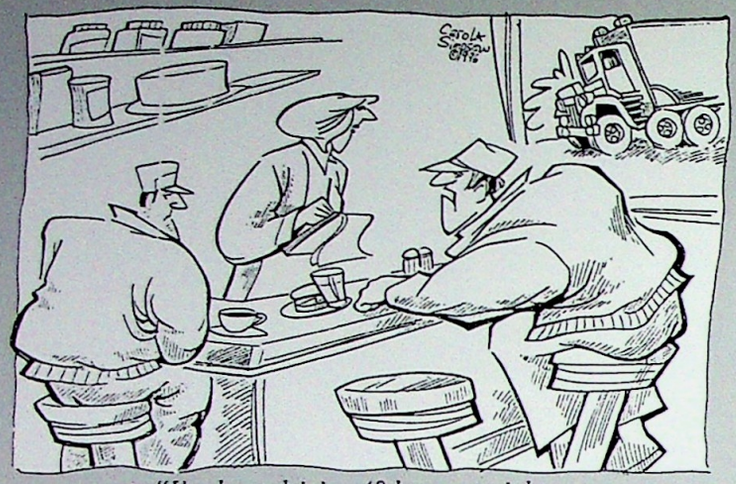
UNPLUGGED



"I've been driving 48 hours straight... bring me a coffee plantation."

A cross-country truck driver from Montreal unplugged his truck's satellite tracking system and took his cargo of 1,400 cases of broccoli hostage in what he called a protest against unsafe working conditions. Gilles Lacombe was arrested in Iowa, but released after the prosecutor refused to press charges. Lacombe was given a hero's welcome when he returned to Quebec.

SOLIDARITY

Instead of reporting to work, dock workers in Oakland, California showed up at a courthouse rally in July, shutting down the port. Inside the courtroom, the Pacific Maritime Association, an employers' group, was demanding that the International Longshore and Warehouse Union turn over the names of picketers who refused to allow anyone to work the Neptune Jade, which had been loaded by English scabs. The picketers were showing their solidarity with 500 fired dock workers in Liverpool, England. The employers' group wanted to sue the picketers for damages caused when the ship sat idle for several days.

WORKING OUT! WEST

The Canadian Labour Congress and the Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba Federations of Labour are sponsoring a Prairie Regional Solidarity and Pride Conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered trade unionists and their allies. The purpose of the conference is to look at issues of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation at work, in unions and in the community. The conference will be held at the Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel in Edmonton from October 15-17. Registration is $100. For more info contact your local Federation of Labour or Sue Genge, Canadian Labour Congress, 2841 Riverside Drive, Ottawa, ON K1V 8X7. Phone (613) 521-3400 ext. 281 or 259. Fax (613) 521-4655.

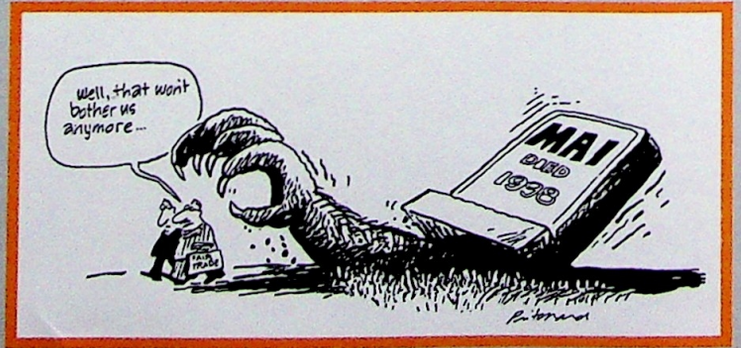
POOR PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE

The second annual Western Canadian Poor People's Conference will be held October 15-18 at the University of Regina. Various workshops, speakers and panels will discuss issues such as the working poor, alternative media, rural poverty, women and poverty, alternative solutions, and community economic development. In addition, to celebrate the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, join a rally at the Legislative Building in Regina on October 17 at 2:00 p.m. For more information about the conference, contact the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry at (306) 352-6386; Fax (306) 352-7455; website: www.bfsmedia.com/RBCS/wcpp.html

WEALTH IN NUMBERS
FIGHTING FOR HOPE

MAI HEARINGS

The government of B.C. is the first government in the world to hold public hearings on the MAI in which the public and activists are encouraged to participate in early 1999. They expect to hear from witnesses from other parts of Canada and the world, as well as B.C. residents. For information contact Craig James, Room 224, Parliament Buildings, Victoria BC V8W 1X4; phone (250) 356-2934; fax (250) 356-8172; Email: craig.james@lass.gov.bc.ca



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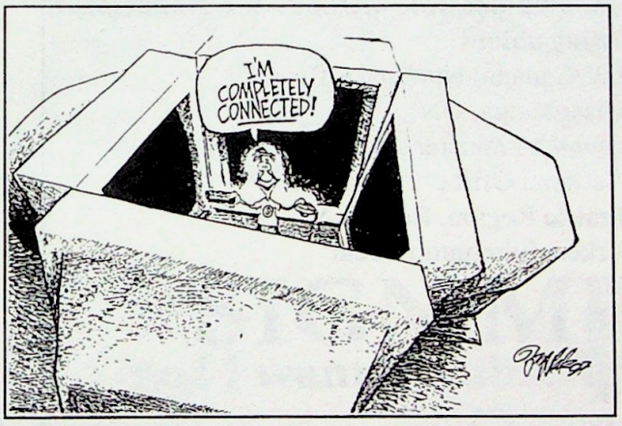

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Briarpatch is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide an open forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Briarpatch magazine was founded in 1973 and is published ten times a year by Briarpatch Inc., an independent non-profit organization. Many of the articles and photographs in Briarpatch are contributed by volunteers. Deadline for the receipt of articles is 45 days preceding publication. Unsolicited contributions will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Opinions expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Briarpatch board of directors or staff. Articles may be reproduced provided proper credits are given. Briarpatch is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association and the staff are members of RWDSU Local 568. The Briarpatch office is at Huston House, 2138 McIntyre Street, Regina, SK S4P 2R7. Phone (306) 525-2949. One year subscription: $24.61. Unions & institutions: $35.31. Publications Mail Registration No. 08152. ISSN 0703-8968. Membership in Briarpatch Inc. is open to groups or individuals upon application and payment of a $1.00 membership fee. Briarpatch is indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index and Alternative Press Index and available on microform from Micromedia, 20 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5C 2N8 and from the Underground Press Collection, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, U.S.A.

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Lara Fishbein

The Labour Issue

Briarpatch is pleased to produce this special issue on union organizing in the new century. Thousands of extra copies have been distributed among trade unionists across the country. We welcome our new readers and encourage you to subscribe.

We would like to thank the coordinators of this special issue:

Cara Banks	Aina Kagis	George Manz
Marjorie Brown	Sharmeen Khan	Guy Marsden
Beth Clarke	Victor Lau	Clare Powell

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RWDSU Local 955, Yorkton, SK
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Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union Head Office, Regina, SK
Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, Regina, SK
United Steelworkers of America, Area Council, Saskatoon, SK

Dear Briarpatch,

I was in ecstasy the first time I heard the rendition of the song *Solidarity Forever, For The Union Makes Us Strong.* But what does it really mean?

In my book, it means if a company, a franchise, or a government misbehaves and a call for a boycott goes out, in a show of solidarity I must avoid any contact with that company, store or product. By word of mouth, I must spread the word. I must not be influenced by what my neighbour, my peer, my supervisor, or my boss does. I must support the call one hundred percent and stay the hell away and not patronize that business, product or service.

Let me give you a few examples:

1. I read an article in a recent issue of *The Reporter* (an OSSTF publication) called "Why We Should Boycott Shell Oil." The company is involved with the notorious government of Nigeria. Until I read that story, I always took my car to a Shell station because of Air Miles. Not any more.

2. My family always bought Black Forest cakes and TimBits from Tim Hortons. One day, at work, a colleague bought a box of TimBits. A friend who was visiting, saw the box and yelled "How could you eat TimBits after what happened in Burlington?" We then learned that, a few months ago, the Tim Hortons franchise in Burlington was the first to be granted union recognition by the Labour Relations Board. The following Monday morning the six employees found their location was razed to the ground by a bulldozer. The owner of the franchise, it was reported, would be rebuilding a new franchise half a mile down the road. The six employees, tearfully, went home. They now belonged to a union, but were out of work. Do you think I'll ever step inside *any* Tim Hortons again?

3. And then we heard about an identical situation in a McDonald's franchise in Quebec. Will I ever go to McDonald's again? Never.

4. Take the Toronto *Sun*. I was out there picketing along with the teachers during the recent teachers' strike. On the third morning I looked at the red box - the screaming headline "Who The Hell Do They Think They Are?" got my attention. Faces of the teachers union leaders were all over the front page. Forget about my ever buying a *Sun*. I don't even look at the red box any more.

We talk about the power of the people. Do we really know the power of the people? Remember when properties in the Greater Toronto Area were reassessed? Suddenly there was a hue and cry, threats of "we won't pay, we'll be forced to close." Some people's taxes had gone up over 450 percent. And the Tories blinked big-time. One day, Toronto mayor Mel Lastman was being told "if you don't fix it, we'll move in and legislate it." Two days later someone was eating crow, and issued a statement that taxes would not go above a 2.5 percent spread over three years. *That's people power.*

If we really and truly organize telephone trees and, by word of mouth, tell our union members and co-workers what we should be doing and who we should be boycotting, a lot will be accomplished. If instead of coming together, in solidarity, we argue and bicker about who's greater than whom, we allow governments to demonize and divide us. Very soon they will annihilate us and every public enterprise will be privatized.

D. D'Souza
Scarborough, ON

Dear Briarpatch,

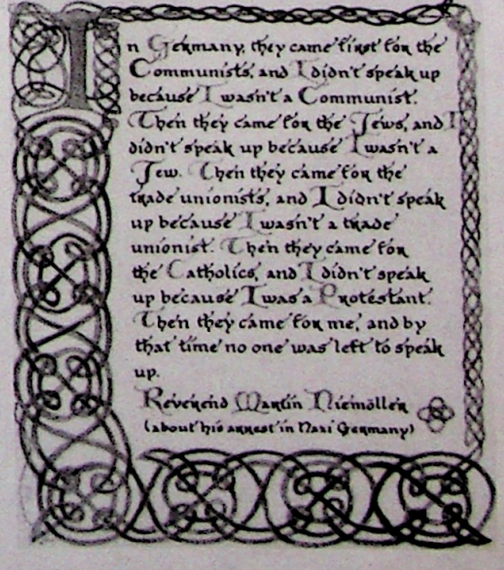
I was thrilled to receive a call from your editor advising me that I had won an art prize in the *Briarpatch* art raffle. It has arrived safe and sound and is now hanging in a place in my home where I can read and appreciate it every day.

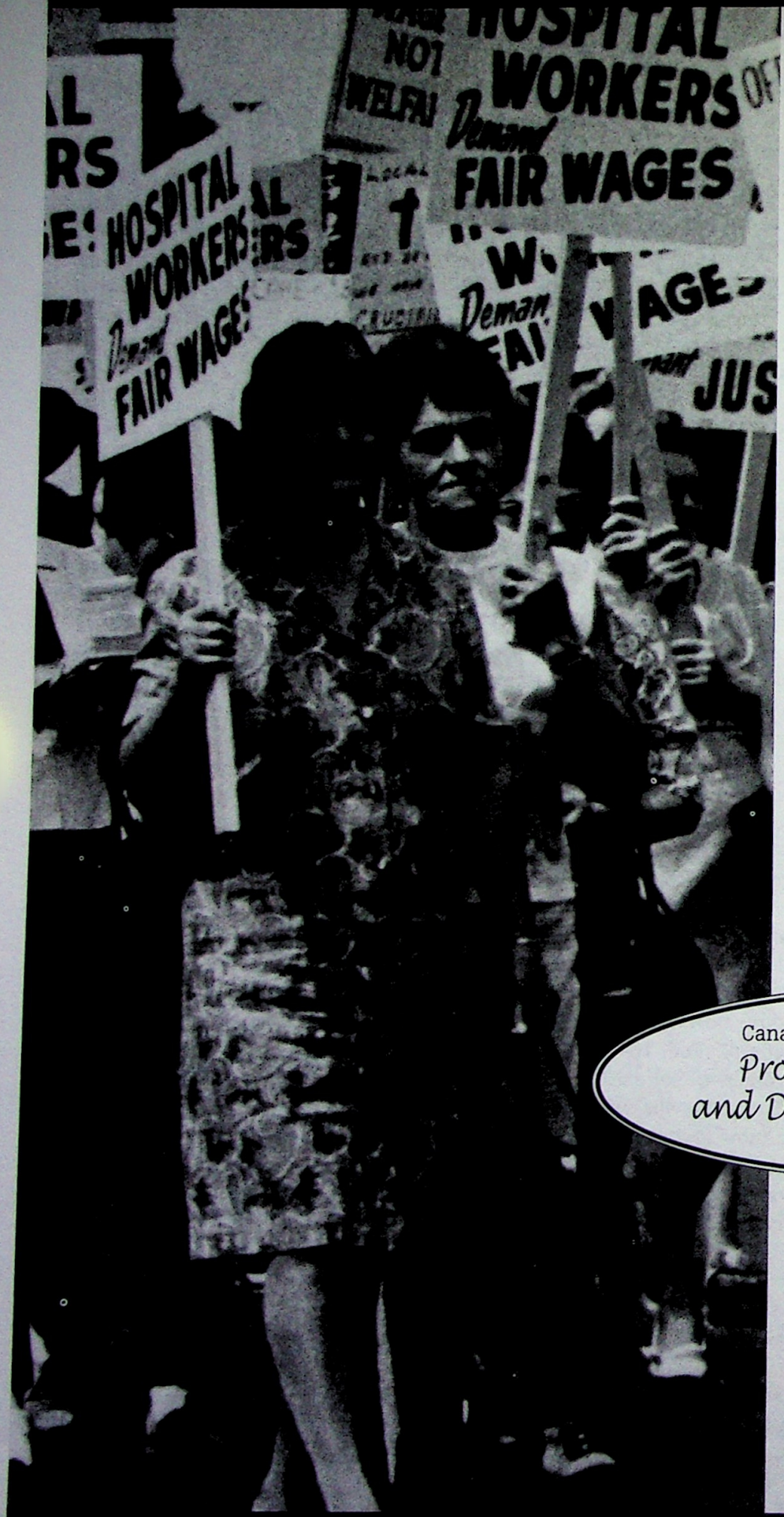
The prize is an illuminated rendering of Rev. Martin Niemöller's lament about not speaking up in Nazi Germany. In a recent women's educational seminar that I attended, we were discussing the reluctance of women in our union to speak out about injustice and harassment within the union. The facilitator reminded us about Rev. Niemöller's words. All of us were familiar with the words, but no one actually owned a copy. I am happy to say that now I do own a copy!

The artist, Susan Hopkins McQuarrie, has presented Rev. Niemöller's words beautifully scripted and surrounded by an interlacing Celtic border symbolizing the interconnectedness of all living things. I particularly like the small briar intertwined with the border which as she says in her note, "symbolizes *Briarpatch* magazine, which *does* speak up."

I subscribe to several magazines that contest the ubiquitous message of the neo-liberal norm. *Briarpatch* adds an effective and distinctive voice to those. I will continue to look forward to receiving each new publication.

Marsha Carew
Castlegar, BC





Alberta hospital workers marching for $1.75 an hour.

The attack on the public sector is an attack on women. It's good jobs for women that are lost. It's services women need that are cut. It's women who are expected to pick up the pieces.

CUPE's National Women's Conference in November will focus on the impact of privatization on women. Exposing the threat. Reaching out. Taking action.

For 35 years, CUPE has been committed to the struggle for women's equality. And we've understood the key role of the public sector in advancing women's interests.

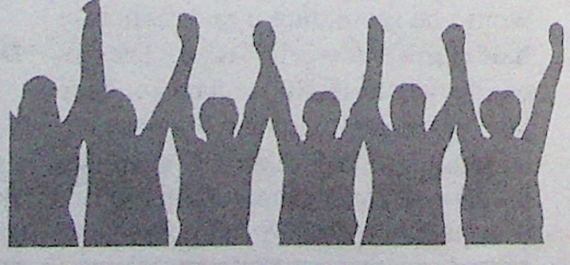
For the past 25 years, this struggle has been nourished and inspired by the leadership, strength and solidarity of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

Happy Birthday NAC.

We need you now more than ever.

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Protecting Women's Jobs and Defending Public Services



Organizing in the New Century

Meeting the challenges of the future.

by Guy Marsden

The benefits of belonging to a union have never been more evident. According to a recent Statistics Canada study, the average hourly wage of a full-time unionized worker during the first half of 1997 exceeded that of a non-unionized worker by $18.87 to $15.32. For part-time workers, the wage gap was even larger. Unionized part-timers made $16.68 versus $9.97 for their non-unionized counterparts.

Unionized workers are also twice as likely as non-unionized employees to enjoy non-wage benefits like employer-sponsored pension plans, health and dental plans and paid sick leave entitlement. Union members also have access to better vacation entitlements and work arrangements like job sharing.

Yet the prospects of union membership seem remote for many. Although the unionized work-force in Canada increased steadily during the 1970s and 1980s, this decade saw an absolute drop of 263,000 union members from 1992 to 1997. The percentage of Canada's labour force that is unionized now sits at 31.5 percent. With much of the public sector already organized, and industrial sector downsizing taking its toll on blue collar workers, many unions are turning their attention to organizing the smaller workplaces of the low-wage service sector.

The unionization of a McDonald's restaurant in Squamish, B.C., the first ever in North America, represents a watershed for the labour movement in Canada. When Jennifer Wiebe, 17, and Tessa Lowinger, 16, approached the Canadian Auto Workers for help in unionizing their workplace, the motivating factor was not money, but respect. McDonald's attempted to pad its employee list with anti-union workers, but in the end the B.C. Labour Relations Board certified the CAW as the representative of the workers.

This special issue of *Briarpatch* examines the many challenges facing the labour movement as it attempts to organize non-unionized workers in the 1990s. Cara Banks and Beth Clarke examine the problems in organizing young workers who are increasingly confined to low-paying and part-time jobs in the retail and food service sectors. On the one hand, many unions feel that it does not pay to organize a small workplace like a coffee shop. The transient nature of the workplaces is another deterrent. On the other hand, many young people don't have time to get involved in building a union because they are students or work at other jobs.

However, as Banks and Clarke observe, more young people are recognizing that they may be stuck flipping hamburgers or pouring coffee much longer than originally anticipated. As a result, young people have played an active role in successful, but hard-fought, union drives at Starbucks, Wal-Mart, and Suzy Shier.

Canada's powerful financial sector has also been successful in resisting unionization attempts. Jean Rands provides a history of the 1970s attempt to organize bank workers by the Service Office & Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC). Despite a well-organized campaign, the feminist union was thwarted by an effective anti-union campaign by the banks which included harassment, court

appeals and freezing wages in pro-union branches while increasing wages and improving benefits in non-union branches. According to Rands, the banks' insistence on branch-by-branch bargaining stretched the union's financial and volunteer resources to the breaking point.

Bob Hatfield and David Durning make the case for sectoral or broader-based organizing which would allow for collective bargaining across workplaces in a particular sector or geographical area. However, Hatfield and Durning note that most labour relations boards continue to use a restrictive definition of the scope of the bargaining unit and therefore, broader-based organizing and bargaining occur only when employers think it in their best interests. Until labour legislation can be changed to allow for sectoral and regional bargaining, the authors argue that unions should continue to employ pattern bargaining to set trends throughout sectors like the auto, oil and gas refining, and pulp and paper industries.

Solidarity rally in Port Alberni, B.C.
photo: Elaine Brière

The task of organizing unions is made more difficult when right-wing governments like Ontario's Conservatives gut labour legislation. However, Paul Clifford argues that, despite the legislative framework, there are still some basic organizing fundamentals that should be followed. Organizers must emphasize the fight for respect, establish an organizing committee to recruit co-workers, and push workers into taking action.

Clifford reminds us that "Forming a union is not a mechanical, technical or legal process. It is building a workplace organization through which workers find strength in each other and are able to take action."

For several years, U.S. labour leaders pointed to bad labour laws as the main obstacle to organizing. But as Jane Slaughter reports, the 1995 election of John Sweeney to the presidency of the AFL-CIO sparked a renewed emphasis on organizing non-unionized workers. Although organizing has definitely increased, the American unionization rate remains abysmal at only 14 percent of the labour force.

Slaughter argues that despite the increased resources being allocated to organizing, U.S. unions are not targeting workplaces that are more likely to unionize - such as white collar service industries dominated by women workers. Moreover, these unions are not using tactics which are more likely to succeed such as emphasizing personal contact, using on-the-job pressure tactics, establishing active organizing committees representative of the work-force, and building for the first contract before the union is established.

Why do some unions continue with unsuccessful tactics?

According to Slaughter, "some unions may shun the construction of strong, active, militant committees of rank-and-filers because they are not accustomed to, and in many cases are frightened of, building the kind of new unions that this would imply: democratically controlled and bottom-up."

The proliferation of non-standard work – part-time, temporary and self-employment – is also making the task of organizing workers increasingly difficult. As Heather Menzies observes, "workers are closed off from each other, as they increasingly work one-on-one with computers, out of touch with each other in space, and out of sync with each other in time." As a result, the "traditional glue of labour solidarity is disappearing."

Menzies believes that unions can overcome the challenges to organizing in the new economy by taking advantage of new communications technology like electronic mail, providing research on labour standards for teleworkers, and personally engaging workers in malls and coffee shops.

The globalization of the economy is leading to a proliferation in the number of homeworkers, not only in the Third World but here in Canada too, argues Josephine Savarese. Homeworkers, which are overwhelmingly women, do not have access to labour standards, minimum wages and unemployment insurance.

The number of homebased workers increased by 40 percent between 1981 and 1991 and promises to expand even further as trade barriers continue to fall. The growth of homework recently prompted the International Labour Organization to ratify a Convention which outlined international labour standards for the informal economy.

Savarese also writes that Canadian unions like UNITE are embracing a "community organizing style" by teaming up with the Homeworkers Association to advocate for more humane workplaces.

The public's perception of unions obviously plays a big role in the success of organizing new unions and strengthening existing unions. The attitudes of governments, the public education system and an increasingly conservative media shape our views on the role of unions in society, argues Clare Powell. The labour movement needs to put more emphasis on internal union education, direct communication with the public through door-to-door blitzing and leafleting, and initiatives like the SFL/CLC's summer youth camp in order to promote labour's agenda.

In a similar vein, Joan Thomson explains how one local of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers successfully lobbied the Calgary Board of Education to include a labour component as part of the social studies curriculum. Thanks to a lot of hard work and the financial support of several unions and coalition partners, a more balanced approach to labour history is now being taught to junior and senior high school students in the heartland of the Klein revolution.

On a closing thought, Victor Lau argues in the Prairie Notebook that the trade union movement must take some radical steps if it is to continue to prosper. According to Lau, unions must embrace international solidarity, change union structures to encourage greater membership participation and more democratic decision-making, and explore longer-term objectives like worker ownership.

Guy Marsden is the Executive Assistant for CUPE Saskatchewan and a regular contributor to Briarpatch.

CSU

A Trade Union for Trade Union Workers

Chances are, you haven't heard of the Canadian Staff Union (CSU).

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CSU members bargain contracts, handle grievances and arbitrations, organize workplaces and do the dozens of other jobs necessary to get the best possible wages, benefits and working conditions for public sector employees.

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CSU is about 300 strong, and we serve over 460,000 CUPE members across Canada.

We work for union members, and we're proud to be union members too! We're dedicated to protecting and maintaining Canada's social programs and the jobs of the workers who provide them.

CSU congratulates Briarpatch for continuing the struggle as a progressive voice for working people and their organizations.

Young workers line up for their pay at a turn of the century factory. Some are as young as six. Many don't have shoes.

No group fought harder
to end child labour
than trade unions.

The labour movement
also led the fight for
old age pensions,
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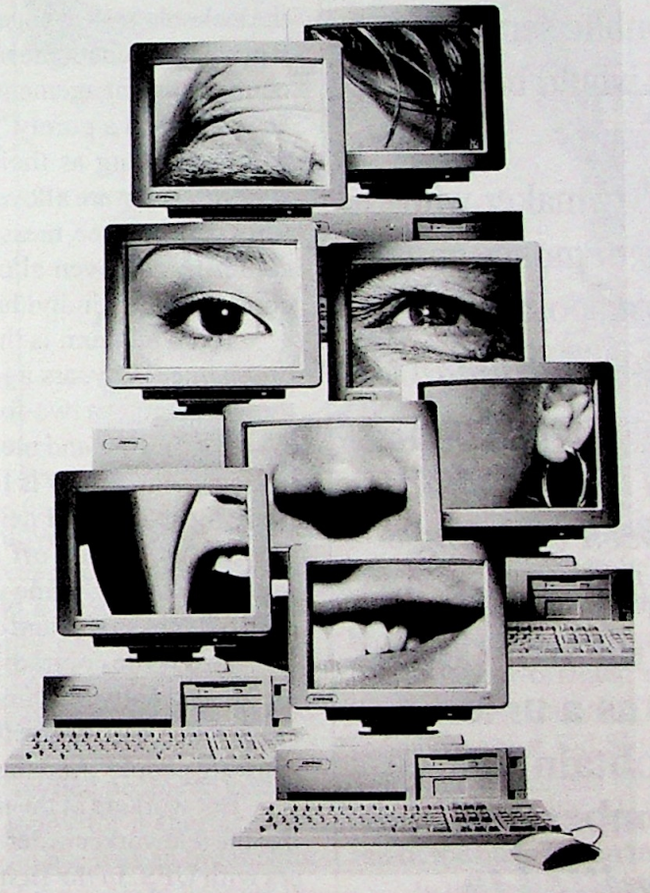
Organizing in the New Economy

Meeting the challenges of organizing and communicating in an evolving work-force.

by Heather Menzies



It'll be tough organizing workers in the new economy. Tough because the traditional glue of labour solidarity is disappearing: Warm bodies working shoulder to shoulder, walking to and from break together, sharing the same shift in the same space, the same humiliations and gestures of resistance.

Now people rub shoulders with computers, modems and software: management information systems that also have the power of surveillance.

In the move from an industrial to a post-industrial economy run by networked organizational structures locally and globally, the most dramatic changes in the labour scene are probably not globalization itself nor the related corporate governance associated with NAFTA, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and, possibly still, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, though these certainly are important. The most important changes might in fact be far less grand and infinitely more personal: the fragmentation of workers as groups into isolated individuals who if they work together at all, probably do so for shorter and shorter periods of time. The bias is built into how the new economy itself is designed and organized, through global digital networks.

There are two elements to this, the first being digitization itself. Much of the information underpinning work and the management of work in the industrial economy is being transformed into the dynamic state of electronic bits. That done, all the digitized bits - automated production modules, information sub-systems plus related software and electronic files - can be linked together both within institutions and between them, creating the network of inter-connecting networks called the digital knowledge, or knowledge-systems, economy.

Networks and digitization are the key to the fragmentation of work going on with restructuring. They make it possible to de-institutionalize all kinds of work, to contract it out through a global and local division of labour located at home (as teleworkers), in call centres and satellite offices, or in agile factories and workshops, and all managed through the networked organizational structures of virtual corporations and virtual joint ventures.

It's a bit like Alice through the looking glass, a reversal. The machine (and its control) is no longer so much on the desk in front of us. It's as much in the lines and

Our Work, Our Union, Our Community.

We persisted and won!

Fourteen years ago,
when we began our battle to achieve
pay equity
in the federal public service,
we knew the fight would be long
and difficult.

The employer is a lawmaker with
boundless sources of money and
lawyers at its disposal.

But a recent Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision agrees with us and found the Canadian government has been violating its own law.

While the fight is far from over, we believe that as a union, it is our duty to obtain justice for our members.

We are committed to social justice

But above all, we stand by our members!

For more information on the PSAC or if you would like to become a member, please call the PSAC Regional Office nearest you or visit our website at http://www.psac.com.

Public Service Alliance of Canada

connecting switches running behind walls, under floors, and between satellites high in space. The machine is now all around us. We live in the machine: a vast programmable corporate machine, capable of programming us. And capable of pulling the plug on our own ability to run our lives, and our local places of work, in ways that lie outside these systems of management and social organization, outside their logic and control.

Digital restructuring has facilitated the rise in "non-standard" forms of work - self-employment, part-time, temporary work - since the mid-1980s. (Self-employment accounted for over three-quarters of total job growth between 1989 and 1996. The 1996 census reported a 20 percent increase in part-time employment since 1991, with 44 percent of women now working part-time.) These changes fit the technological changes because intelligent networks make it possible to uncouple more and more working people from continuous engagement in concrete worksites, and re-engage them on a purely "contingent" basis, only as needed and for as long as their time or skills are required. The system's software allows corporations to monitor each person's performance, measure it according to their credentialed skill sets, and even allocate pay, or pay supplements, according to their individual "value-added" performance.

If the medium is the message, as Marshall McLuhan proclaimed 30 years ago, then the message designed into these systems is a two-fold closure: first, workers are closed into a definition and meaning of work entirely dictated by management, as pay is linked to performance which is entirely measured and defined by the system; and, second, workers are closed off from each other, as they increasingly work one-on-one with computers, out of touch with each other in space, and out of sync with each other in time.

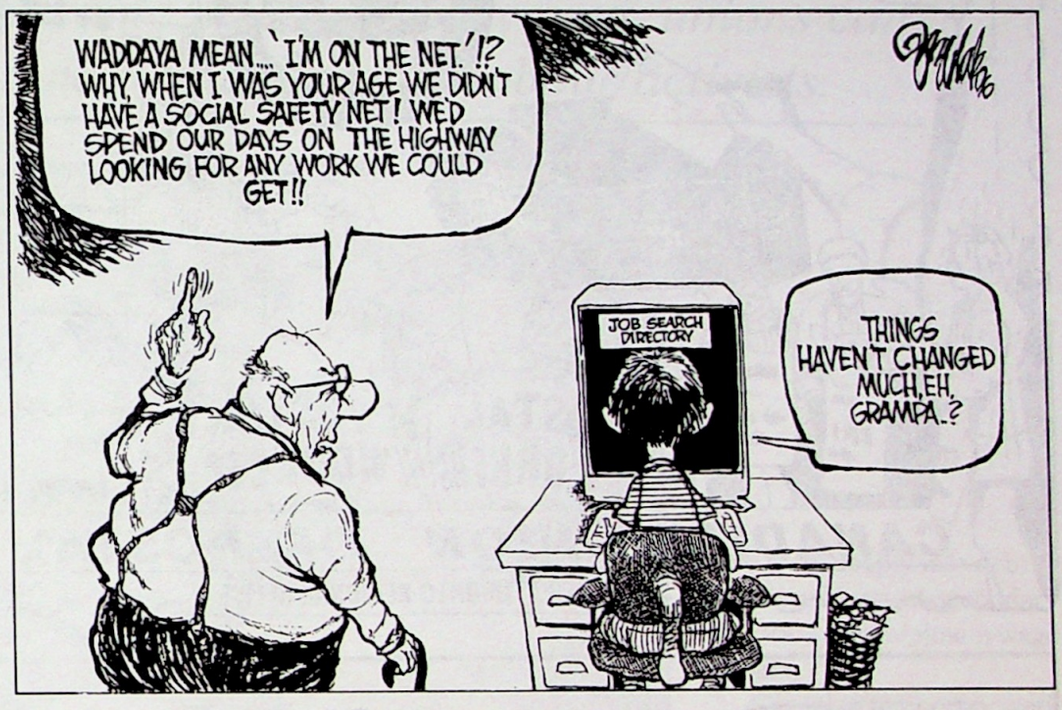
This is the contradiction of "instant global connectivity." It's actually machines - management's machines - that are in touch with each other, not people. Certainly not most working people. And that's the problem.

But workers in the new economy have begun to organize: the teleworker order-takers for Pizza Pizza and the drivers with UPS. In the first case, organizing had begun when the workers were physically working together. With UPS, at least one factor was in workers breaking the silence on their exploitation, and getting the story out.

There are many challenges to organizing in the new economy, but this is surely a key: preserving the personal, renewing the bonds of shared experience. The personal is political. Not only that. The personal in the present moment is political.

That's why union culture has traditionally been an oral culture. It's the medium through which workers have named the sometimes ridiculous contradictions of their experience, and in speaking about them in the here and now, have made them real enough to act on.

So, one of the first challenges to organizing in the new economy is to counter the command and control aspect of management's communication with personally engaging forms of communication among working people: in malls and coffee shops and also through (secure) electronic mail. If the message we want in the new economy is that there's a place for everyone, and that everyone has a right to be treated fairly, justly and with dignity in the digital new world order, then that's how we have to go about it: By talking about globalization in the language of how it's affecting people on the streets where they live. Or, as Ursula Franklin would put it: globalization as if people matter. Not in some abstract future either, but right now.



A de-institutionalized workforce also calls for a de-institutionalized union. Perhaps unions could work together in running a workers' information service to which people can turn for research and counselling on, for example, standards for teleworkers: what share of overhead employers have to pay; basic ergonomic considerations for setting up a work space in your bedroom; what's counted by employers as paid versus unpaid work. Unions' research offices need to keep track of best-practices precedents to build a case for appropriate new labour standards. Their equity and harassment personnel can also provide support to women, children and minorities being targeted for exploitation, or being abused or harassed.

Nearly a century ago, unions invited people to join the 9-hour league: a common-front lobby for a shorter work week. Unions could revive that, and use it as an organizing tool - essentially a stepping stone for people to become involved in collective action. A stepping stone to unionization.

A third challenge for organizing is to realize how much the home is being integrated into the new economy. It is becoming, therefore, a site for struggle and for resistance. On this last point, it's useful to track the statistics on people's purchase of a home computer. Not only are the numbers growing by leaps and bounds - with significant gaps for single parents (generally women) and the unemployed. But work features heavily in people's reasons for buying computers and related communication tools (such as modems). A study by Ekos Research Associates released in January 1998, found that 38 percent of men and 36 percent of women with home computers used them for work (second only to their using them for education). These home computers could become an important base for communicating and organizing laterally, overcoming the fragmentation and isolation engendered by global corporate networks.

This cannot be taken for granted, nor should it be undertaken in isolation from engaged face-to-face communication. But it could be cultivated as a tool: Not only useful in one-to-one communication, permitting isolated home-based teleworkers to be in touch with fellow workers to compare notes and get support. It could also sustain broader, broadcasting forms of communication, through listserves full of labour-oriented news such as Solinet operated by the Canadian Union of Public Employees or the more informal one that Sid Shniad, director of research with the Telecommunications Workers' Union, maintains (and which regularly informs me of things which have been blacked out of the mainstream media).

In the present state of our civic society where most of the mass media have become captives or accomplices of the corporate agenda, it's vital that working people have a collective mirror reflecting their own concerns. It's vital too that this mirror operate on a scale that permits a critical mass of public perception: a perception not only that the digital new economy has been designed and wired to be undemocratic, unhealthy and unjust, and not only that it can be designed and organized differently. But a conviction flowing from this perception that we can also act on our own take on reality, and change things.

Heather Menzies is the author of the 1996 bestseller Whose Brave New World?

GRAIN SERVICES UNION (ILWU · Canada)

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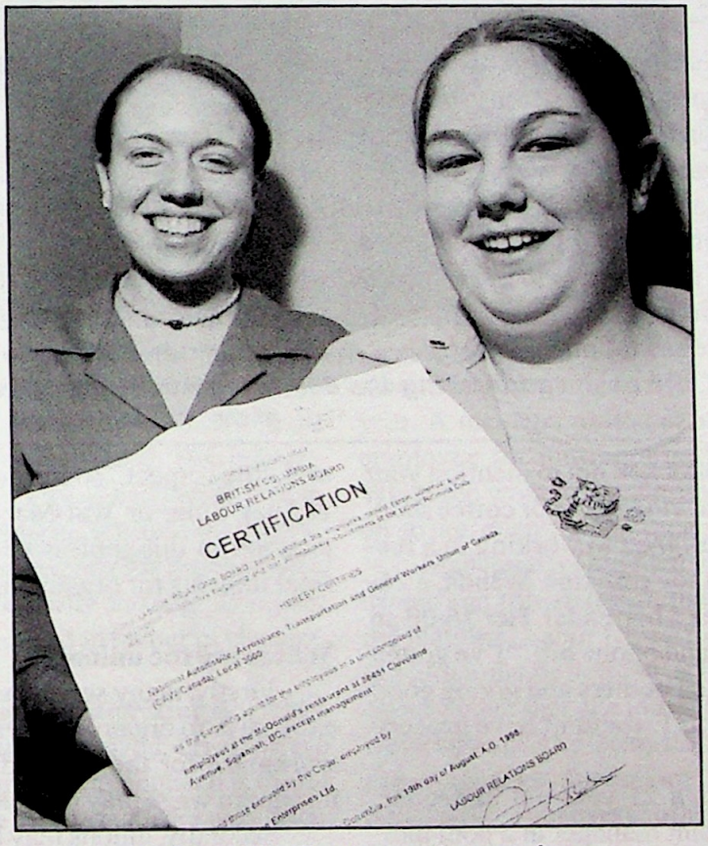
Greetings and Solidarity from the members of Grain Services Union.

Representing workers in Western Canada for over 60 Years.

Closing the Generation Gap

By reaching people when they're young, unions can develop a new generation of labour activists.

by Cara Banks & Beth Clarke



McDonald's Restaurant organizers Jennifer Wiebe and Tessa Lowinger.
photo: Colin Price / Vancouver Province

Each time you drive through for a burger and fries, pick up a last minute gift for a birthday, stop for a drink on your way home from work, or drop by the corner store for milk, you're probably served by a young person. Chances are that young person works for minimum wage, in a non-unionized workplace with few or no benefits. Words like "casual," "temporary," "contract," and "part-time" are commonplace for young workers. They've come to expect that these are the only jobs available to them, not just for a few years during school, but for the long haul.

The reality of non-unionized work

What's it like to be a young, non-unionized worker in the nineties? In Saskatchewan, chances are it means you earn minimum wage (a whopping $5.60 an hour). A minimum wage income makes it difficult to merely survive, let alone pay for school or support a child. Part-time work might pay for textbooks and a parking pass, or rent if you're lucky. Of course, with regular increases in tuition, you'd have to go deeply into debt to even consider post-secondary education on a minimum wage income.

Casual or temporary work is another phenomenon on the rise. In other words, forget financial stability and don't count on any benefits. That means no dental plan, no medical plan, no vision plan, not to mention disability, sick leave, job security, seniority, and no way to make a grievance.

It's quite common for employers to take advantage of young workers' lack of knowledge about labour laws, so occupational health and safety standards are often broken.

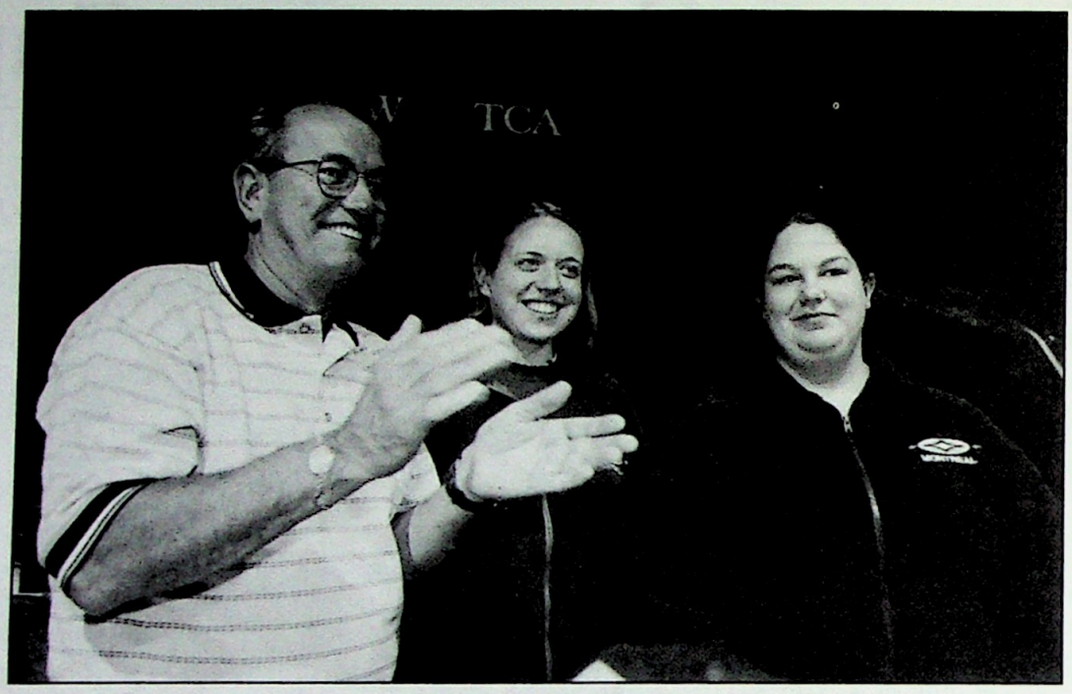
Kristin, (not her real name), is 16 years old and works in a fast food restaurant. On her third day on the job she sustained a second-degree burn while operating a fryer. "I was never shown how to use the fryer. They just assumed it was my own clumsiness. Later on I learned how to do it by watching someone else." Kristin says she's never heard of an occupational health and safety committee in her workplace.

Some employers also break regulations on overtime

and work breaks. Another common complaint is that employers aren't paying a minimum of three hours when workers are called in and then told to go home when business slows down.

In the service industry, where you'll find the most new workers, maximum hours are a major problem. Employers hire entry-level employees at minimum wage rather than giving the most available hours to senior employees who want and need them. If there are complaints, employers make it known that the workers can be replaced by other young workers desperate for a job, a second job, a third job....

It seems that the next generation of workers is being forced to stay in the most insecure and underpaid employment. A 1996 StatsCan report says that the ten lowest paying industries in the country were service-based (food service, retail, and accommodation). Some of these employers include Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Starbucks, Suzy Shier, and Footlocker, not to mention your favourite bar, restaurant, cinema, video store or coffee shop.



Buzz Hargrove thanking Jennifer Wiebe and Tessa Lowinger for addressing the 800 delegates at the CAW Council in August.
photo: Photo Features

Some young people are resigned to working in a restaurant or pub because at least they earn tips. Wanda, a 26-year-old single mother, works as a bartender. Her $6.00 an hour wage barely pays her rent and phone bill. "I've gotten really good at being friendly to customers and giving good service because without their tips I wouldn't have grocery money."

Doug, (not his real name), a 21-year-old bartender, was recently promoted to assistant manager at a pool hall. His wage remained the same at $6.00 an hour and his hours stayed at about 35-40 hours per week, yet his responsibilities increased. "This is an important step for me because if they trust me to be assistant manager, I'm hoping someday I'll make it to manager." Doug receives no financial or health and welfare benefits from moving up in the company, only the hope that if he sticks it out long enough he may get another new title.

The need for unionization in the service industry is very high. Salespeople in retail chain stores often work for years and still make minimum wage. In the retail industry, pay increases are very rare. Hours of work are erratic as workers are expected to put in full-time hours near Christmas, yet later they can get as little as one shift per week at management's whim. Some workers are expected to float around the city to work in other chain stores on demand.

While this profile looks pretty grim, ironically it may provide the fertile ground for organizing young workers who are fed up with low wages, inconsistent scheduling, and little respect. Young people are realizing that working at Suzy Shier or Wal-Mart isn't going to be a temporary position in this jobless economy. Sadly, this may be the final impetus for organizing and getting active in a union.

Where are the unions?

Firstly, many service sector workplaces are small and expensive to organize. Paying a union staffer to organize a workplace for the union dues of only a dozen people at minimum wage may not make financial sense.

Secondly, unions may be reluctant because workers in the service sector are often transient, making them difficult to organize. Furthermore, part-time or casual workers can be more difficult to approach. They often don't have enough time to lead or join an organizing drive because they are students or are working at other jobs or caring for children. For the few young people who have temporary unionized positions, a four-month stint isn't enough time to get "in" to a union role. It's not enough time to see what the union does or could do for workers in the future.

Unions may not have the resources to go out looking for workplaces to unionize, but most young workers aren't looking for unions either. With few youth visible in the labour movement, and the majority non-unionized, the idea of belonging to a union seems unlikely or impossible. No

matter how bad the workplace gets, joining a union is rarely seen as an option.

The struggle to organize

Even where unions fight for young workers it can be a long and expensive battle.

The recent union drive in a Wal-Mart store in Windsor by the United Steelworkers of America is a clear sign of the times. Wal-Mart fought the drive at every level, right to the Supreme Court. The Court ruled in the union's favour, upholding the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruling that Wal-Mart deprived workers of legitimate freedom of choice by refusing to answer questions about whether the store would remain open if a union was formed.

Wal-Mart also fought the choice workers were given on a ballot - either to ratify the contract or to go on strike. Wal-Mart says its workers were not given a fair choice, and the company is gaining some workers' support. Court battles can be alienating to workers who fear losing their jobs. Without education about unions and labour laws, workers don't know what to believe. The Steelworkers are convinced management is behind a decertification drive, and they're probably right. Unfortunately, that type of management is employing today's youth.

In 1996, the first Starbucks in North America was organized by the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) in Vancouver. Job dissatisfaction hit a peak when the Starbucks Labour Scheduling system was implemented. This computer software monitors the productivity of each employee in 15-minute intervals. Not surprisingly, it found that workers who were paid less, made more money for the company. In other words, employees with seniority and slightly higher wages began to see their hours reduced in favour of cheaper, entry-level workers.

The CAW organizing drive was a major struggle. When the Starbucks Distribution Centre unionized, bringing the total unionized outlets to ten, Starbucks announced it would close the centre. Workers there went on strike and other locations went on "Unstrike" where they leafleted customers during work hours.

A year later the first contract was ratified, giving employees an across-the-board wage increase of 75 cents, a grievance procedure and a seniority clause that protects workers from losing shifts due to managerial favouritism. They also negotiated maternity leave, severance pay and retraining for laid-off Distribution Centre workers. Starbucks has decided to give all workers these gains at their 96 locations in B.C.

On August 19, 1998, CAW became the first union to successfully organize a McDonald's in North America. The outlet was in Squamish, B.C., a town 40 kilometers from Vancouver. According to CAW's Denise Kellahan, the unionization drive "was very quick." She explains that B.C.'s labour laws allow for automatic certification when 55 percent or more workers have signed a union card. They are preparing now to negotiate the first collective agreement for McDonald's workers.

A major reason for this success was that workers approached the CAW wanting to unionize. Two grade 12 students, Jennifer Wiebe, 17, and Tessa Lowinger, 16, approached the union in July. Kellahan says, "the workers showed tremendous leadership in organizing," so that the union was able to apply for certification only four days after being approached by the workers. Kellahan sees organizing in the service sector as an increasing trend: "People are staying in these jobs much longer than in former years. They're discovering they want to have a say in their working conditions wages and benefits. Organizing creates more stability in their lives." This stability is key for young people who want to start their lives or even start a family.

Unfortunately, McDonald's has fought organizing drives successfully in St. Hubert, Quebec, mostly because they have the resources to do so. They have used such tactics as cutting hours, shuffling pro-union employees to "divide and conquer," and hiring new workers to derail unionization. They even went so far as to shut down a franchise that was sure to unionize.

Meanwhile, in Macedonia, Ohio, two young workers who tried to organize a McDonald's were fired earlier this year. A manager yelled at and manhandled a 66-year-old employee for putting a garbage bag in the wrong place. When the woman went home crying, her co-workers went on strike, even though they weren't members of a union.

Management claimed the fired workers blocked an entrance and threatened a manager. To make matters worse, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that the bargaining unit must be defined as the three stores with a common owner rather than the individual store where the union cards were signed. The Teamsters started the drive and despite these setbacks, they claim they have received requests for union drives at several other fast food restaurants.

Retail organizing successes

In 1995, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) organized a Suzy Shier store in Toronto. Although the battle was lost at two other outlets, the newly-unionized workers, mostly women, received an hourly increase of 10 to 15 cents and a grievance procedure in their first contract.

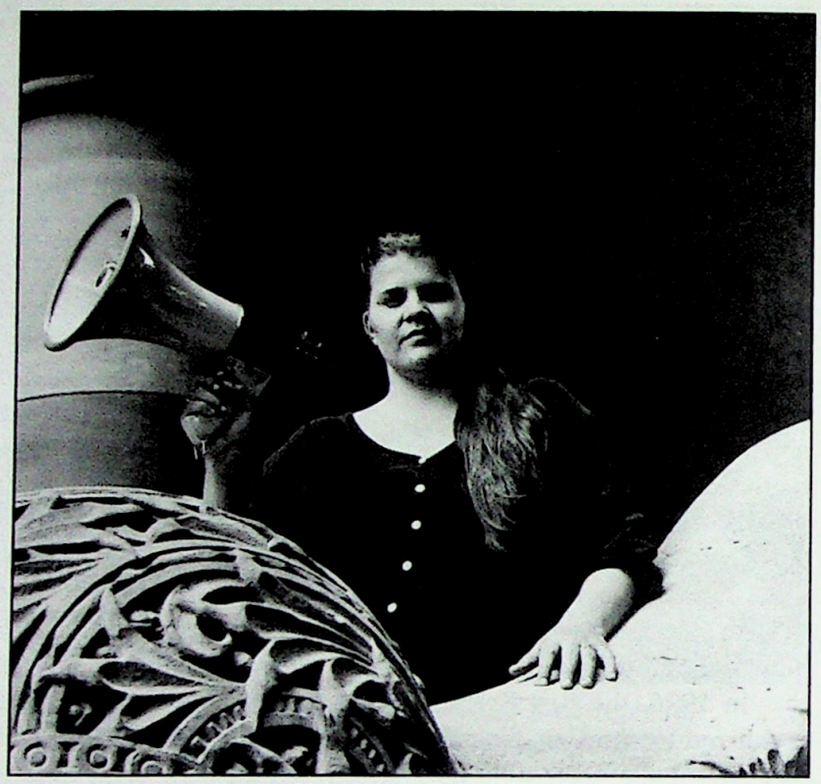
Alex Dagg, manager of the Ontario District Council of UNITE, wasn't willing to discuss UNITE's organizing strategy, except to say "we are focusing mainly on industrial sectors." She says UNITE doesn't want to promote their organizing efforts because that will alert employers and other unions to the shops they are approaching. It is unclear how much these efforts will help to unionize young

people.

UNITE has, however, expressed a major commitment to organizing among their own membership to get more young people involved in their union. The recent election of a 26-year-old woman as president of the Ontario District Council is an excellent example.

Wynne Hartviksen says she is used to being one of the only young people at union events, where she served the last three years as UNITE's Ontario District Council vice-president. Five years ago, she was also the exception among her friends, because she was the only one who belonged to a union. "Now almost every one of my friends has either organized a union in their workplace or is a member of a union."

Hartviksen first became involved in the labour movement at the age of 21 when she led a drive to organize a small chain of retail stores where she worked. Although the first union she approached turned her down, they at least suggested a union that could help. She recently organized Black Photo, where she worked as a customer service representative in Toronto. She says her involvement became more serious partly because she was encouraged by an older woman in the union to get involved, not just in her shop, but in other aspects of the union.



Wynne Hartviksen
photo: Lara Fishbein

Attract young workers to your union

The need to educate the next generation about the role and benefits of unions is crucial because many young people have not witnessed the power of collective action in the workplace. The first step, it seems, is to involve them.

Young people are often active in various organizations and support various causes. They are active in student politics, women's groups, animal rights associations, anti-racist organizations, and environment groups. They stand up for the rights of children, and gays and lesbians. Young people have fierce commitments to what they believe in, but for the most part, they remain in non-unionized workplaces, outside the union movement.

The easiest way to attract young people to unions is to advertise the links that the labour movement is making between economic equality and social equality, as well as why these links are important. Coalition work may be one of the best ways to teach young people about the history and activities of unions. Unions must take up young people's issues. Students protesting tuition hikes and outrageous loan payments need the support of workers.

Don't mistake feelings of frustration and powerlessness for apathy. Young people are aware of the future of work and the deterioration of social programs. They care about their futures, but feel left out or alienated by older activists who have a tendency to dismiss youth's concern or make generalizations about young people's apathy or laziness.

Young people are told to be grateful that they are employed at all, so they may have difficulty standing up for their rights or fighting for meaningful changes in their workplaces. Listening to and sharing grievances with young people and putting their concerns on a equal playing field with everyone else's is crucial to gaining mutual respect and commitment to issues.

Keep young people active in unions

At the Prairie School for Union Women this past March, organized by a steering committee of union women, there was a workshop called Young Women and Unions. The workshop was a fabulous initiative and the participants seemed to appreciate an opportunity to share their experiences. As facilitators of the course, we found it very exciting to be given the chance to give feedback to our older sisters about issues facing young women in unions. Unfortunately, the ten participants were the only young faces in a delegation of over 180 women.

Sadly, a couple of young women reported being jumped on and put down by some of their union sisters because their views weren't radical or "left-wing" enough. Many remarked that no one asked them to attend union events in their workplaces, and that no one had approached them to explain how the union works. One of the participants, who held an executive position in her local, told us about the backlash she received as a new, young person who didn't

have the "appropriate" seniority to serve her local. Older workers clearly must reach out to younger workers.

Union structures may also have to adapt for young people to get involved and stay involved. For example, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is the first provincial federation that guarantees every affiliated union a delegate spot at their annual convention for those under the age of 25. The SFL also recently organized a Youth Working Group. When the group first met, they raised their maximum age from 25 to 29. They recognized that people in their twenties are stuck in low-paying, dead-end jobs for longer and longer.

Efforts need to be made at the grassroots level as well. Affirmative action for youth is desperately needed at the executive level of unions. With limited resources, union locals are still sending workers with more seniority rather than young workers to labour events. A financial incentive may be necessary for locals, so that sending a young delegate doesn't take away resources from more experienced delegates. Older union members may have to step down from a committee or a conference in order to let a young person participate. Young people need to be approached and asked personally to attend a union event. They might even need someone to take them there.

Trade unionists have to work to make their unions democratic. If a young person joins a union and sees a structure built on hierarchy and authority, they will be turned off. A union that works from the bottom up appeals to those who are used to being in relatively powerless positions at home, in school, and at work. This applies even more so to young women and young workers of colour.

Think about the future

Unions have to make organizing the unorganized a major priority. Look around union convention floors - the labour movement is aging. As the generation of trade unionists starts to retire, the movement will be significantly weaker without the participation of the next generation. Union membership in Canada dropped by 300,000 in the 1990s. It is in the union movement's best interests to go where the workers are.

Talk to the next person who serves you onion rings or pours you a coffee. Find out what they want in their workplace - chances are a union could provide it for them!

Cara Banks is 25 and has worked at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour for four summers. She helped facilitate the Young Women and Unions workshop at the Prairie School for Union Women. Beth Clarke facilitated the Young Women and Unions workshop at the Prairie School for Union Women. She is currently a non-unionized employee of a non-governmental organization working in Southern Africa.

Are You Concerned About Library Services in Regina?

The City of Regina's decision to eliminate the business tax has put the Regina Public Library into financial trouble. A projected operating deficit of $380,000 in 1999, and $660,000 in the year 2000, has led the Library Board to consider *closing* inner-city libraries, the Dunlop Art Gallery and the Film Theatre!

Are You Concerned? Please Write a Letter. Your Voice is Important.

It is crucial that the Library Board and City Council understand the needs of the citizens of Regina. The Library Board is considering its options over the next few weeks.

Please write to the Regina Public Library Board (Gloria Mehlmann, Chair, RPL Board c/o Regina Public Library, Box 2311, Regina S4P 3Z5; or Fax (306) 352-5550); to your city councillors (Mayor Doug Archer and Bill Wells are on the Library Board); or make a presentation to the Board (to do this, make arrangements by calling Ken Jensen, Library Director 777-6070, or Sue Sherwood 777-6099).

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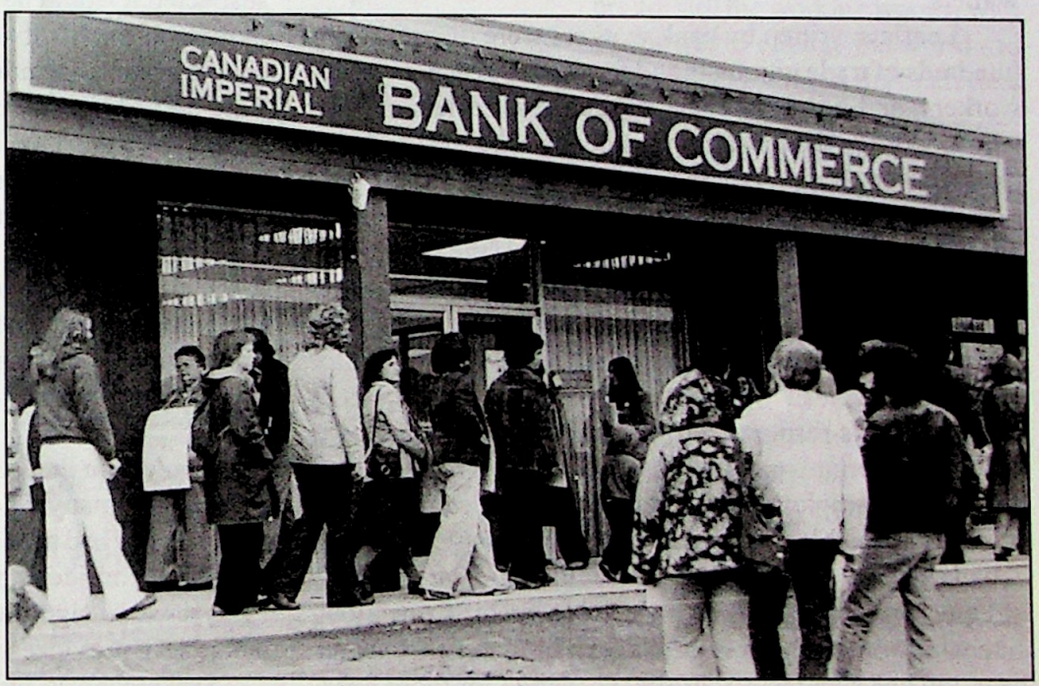
Back to the Future

Lessons from organizing bank workers in the 1970s.

by Jean Rands



Hundreds of SORWUC members and supporters picketed the Gibsons branch of the CIBC on the Sunshine Coast north of Vancouver in 1978.

Canadian bank workers are facing a period of upheaval with no effective voice, no organization, no protection. Proposed bank mergers are expected to lead to a loss of 20,000 jobs.

The workers who will be laid off are mostly women. Many are single parents. The layoffs will not be in order of seniority. In the past, banks have used "shortage of work" as an excuse to get rid of uppity workers without running afoul of the Canada Labour Code. Banks have laid off senior employees and often kept those who were younger, lower paid (and more decorative).

Although the banks are among the most profitable corporations, and bank workers should have tremendous bargaining power, they have none. While bank profits have soared, bank workers have lost ground. Hours of work climbed from 35 to 37 1/2 per week in some banks, with no increase in pay. Some dental plans aren't as good as they were in 1978.

Twenty years ago bank workers were benefiting from a union scare. A small independent feminist union had launched a campaign that caught the imagination of thousands of bank workers.

From 1976 to 1978, the United Bank Workers section of SORWUC (Service Office & Retail Workers' Union of Canada) signed up over 700 bank workers, and applied for certification for almost 50 branches in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Yet today, SORWUC and UBW no longer exist, there are less than 25 union certifications in the whole of Canadian banking industry, and only two branches have been organized in the last ten years.

What happened?

When a small group of Vancouver bank workers joined SORWUC in the summer of 1976, the union responded whole-heartedly. SORWUC had been formed three years earlier out of the Working Women's Association. It included workers in several small bargaining units - restaurants, bars, day care centres, social service agencies, a couple of small offices - as well as a couple of dozen women who wanted to participate in building a movement of working women but were not in a position to organize their own workplaces. For the feminists in SORWUC, the opportunity to organize bank workers was a dream come true. Here was a group of working women with the potential power to win victories

that could benefit all working women.

The bank workers who joined the union were mostly in their twenties. Only two had been involved in previous organizing attempts. With help from other SORWUC activists and support from AUCE (a sister feminist union of university and college employees), they wrote leaflets, met with other bank workers, signed people up, met with Labour Relations Board officers, filed applications for certification and prepared unfair labour practice complaints.

The SORWUC office moved from a member's basement to an inexpensive building downtown. Volunteers were mobilized. With the help of Press Gang, a feminist print shop, we responded to issues in the branches with instant leaflets.

Leaflets written by bank workers were distributed by hundreds of trade unionists and feminists. Teachers, office workers, and postal workers handed out leaflets on their way to work in the morning. Seamen, waitresses, and hospital workers leafleted data centres on their days off. Over a hundred union locals donated money.

For a while it seemed the enthusiasm of the bank workers and their supporters would be enough to offset the power and resources of the banks. In the six weeks after we signed up the Victory Square branch of the CIBC, we applied for ten more branches.

The banks responded by saying that one branch was not an appropriate unit, and that the only appropriate unit would be "all employees in Canada" (which of course would make it impossible for a union to sign up a majority). The Canada Labour Relations Board decided to hear this general question first, and then proceed to specific questions (like who would be in the unit in each branch and whether the union had a majority). While we waited for those hearings, it wasn't clear whether bank workers even had the legal right to unionize. This lengthy legal process added to the strain felt by organizers in the branches, and it was a terrible financial drain on the union.

We tried to sign up as many branches as possible, so the Board would get the message that bank workers were demanding the right to unionize. Meanwhile, the banks did everything they could to undermine the union majority in the branches we'd applied for. Union members were intimidated by supervisors on a daily basis. Anti-union employees claimed joining the union violated the Bank Act. They sent leaflets through the banks' internal mail. In some branches, managers burst into tears when we applied for certification. In others, there were sudden improvements - new equipment, more staff, coffee breaks, even a dental plan and a job posting procedure.

The banks had a captive audience for anti-union propaganda in the branches, but SORWUC was quite successful in the media. Bank workers wrote press releases and gave interviews. It was a way of reaching bank workers who were beyond the scope of the leafleting campaign.

By the time of the hearings in April 1977, we had 20 applications before the Board. (CUBE, another small independent union, had applied for two branches in Ontario.) Bank workers had time off to attend as union reps - our first taste of legitimacy in the branches. The bank vice-presidents and their lawyers found the whole process offensive. Why should they have to come all the way out from Toronto? Why should they have to spend all this time and money dealing with some upstart union representing lowly clerks and tellers?

By this time, we had lost our majority in several branches as a result of the banks' anti-union campaign. We suspected it would be impossible to organize on a branch-by-branch basis - it was too easy for the banks to move people around, intimidate people in small groups, and reward non-union branches while punishing those who had joined. We hoped the Board would establish a geographic unit - a province or a region of some kind, big enough for employees to have some bargaining power. But in June the Board ruled that each branch was an appropriate unit. In July there were more hearings, followed by certification of five branches and votes in 17 more. We were fighting unfair labour practices, campaigning for votes, signing up new branches and desperately fundraising for our soaring legal bills.

Workers at the Royal Bank in Melfort, Saskatchewan were among many who contacted us after the first certifications. They had been meeting secretly for several months. They were confident they had a majority. But it would only make sense to sign them up if we had enough support to undertake a province-wide campaign.

Saskatchewan unions and women's groups were enthusiastic. In August 1977 support committees were formed in Regina and Saskatoon. Money was raised. Leaflets were distributed at every branch in the two cities. RWDSU was particularly generous with donations of money and work.

We applied for the branch in Melfort, and two big branches in Regina. The banks responded strongly. Vacations and benefits were improved; wage freezes and layoffs were threatened; expensive Labour Board hearings were spun out as long as possible.

On top of all this, it became clear that the Canadian Labour Congress was strongly opposing the campaign. A group of bank workers in Saskatoon who had met with SORWUC reps were approached by the Steelworkers union. The USWA officers red-baited SORWUC, and their scare tactics combined with those of the banks convinced the bank workers that they needed a big strong union, affiliated to the CLC. (They joined the Steelworkers but were decertified a couple of years later.) SORWUC protested to the CLC but to no avail. The CLC called on its affiliates to stop giving financial support to the campaign. Their posi-

tion was that SORWUC should not be supported because we weren't affiliated to the CLC, and we couldn't affiliate because we overlapped other unions' jurisdictions.

Anti-union employees in Saskatchewan circulated leaflets saying: "What will we gain if we're force out on strike? NOTHING!! What do we have to lose by waiting? Again, nothing! Once we see if SORWUC can fulfil all of their promises, then we should decide, not now." In fact, bank workers had everything to lose. Without a mass movement of bank workers, there would be no bargaining power and no improvements in job security, wages or benefits.

In the fall of 1977, bank workers held conferences to develop contract proposals. We hoped these would be organizing tools as well as help our bargaining objectives. We proposed joint bargaining. Why should wages and benefits be different for bank workers in different banks? But the banks insisted on branch-by-branch bargaining.

After the initial euphoria felt by bank workers facing their employers "as equals" across the bargaining table, we felt trapped. The process took more time and money than we had. It took time from organizing, and the "wait and see" argument gained strength. Donations could not keep up with expenses and we were drowning in debt. We needed money for lost wages for bank workers who were bargaining. Our three full-time officers had to be laid off. CLRB decisions were being appealed by the banks to the courts. And we had to fight harassment, layoffs and other unfair labour practices. In the spring of 1978, we lost our complaint against the banks' most effective anti-union action. They had frozen wages in the unionized branches, while giving non-union branches wage increases and improvements in benefits. The Board ruled there was nothing illegal about this!

By summer it was clear we would not get a contract without a strike. We took strike votes in three branches, and developed a strategy that involved striking one branch and building a boycott. We hoped this would put pressure on the banks and enable us to keep organizing. But we could not undertake a strike and boycott without the full support of the trade union movement, and without more members in the banks. We met with UBW members all over B.C., hoping someone would come up with another option. In the end we had to withdraw from branch-by-branch negotiations for the 24 branches in B.C. We were sad, angry and exhausted. Our members in Saskatchewan went through the federal conciliation process, but in the end they reached the same conclusion.

The size and power of the banks made the task incredibly difficult. But it was the size of the task that inspired hundreds of volunteers and gave bank workers the courage to put their jobs on the line.

The task remains. Bank workers are still the working women with the power to change the world - to win respect for the skills of clerical workers; to deal with issues like sexual harassment, day care, discrimination; to build an organization that can be a voice for clerical workers in the private sector.

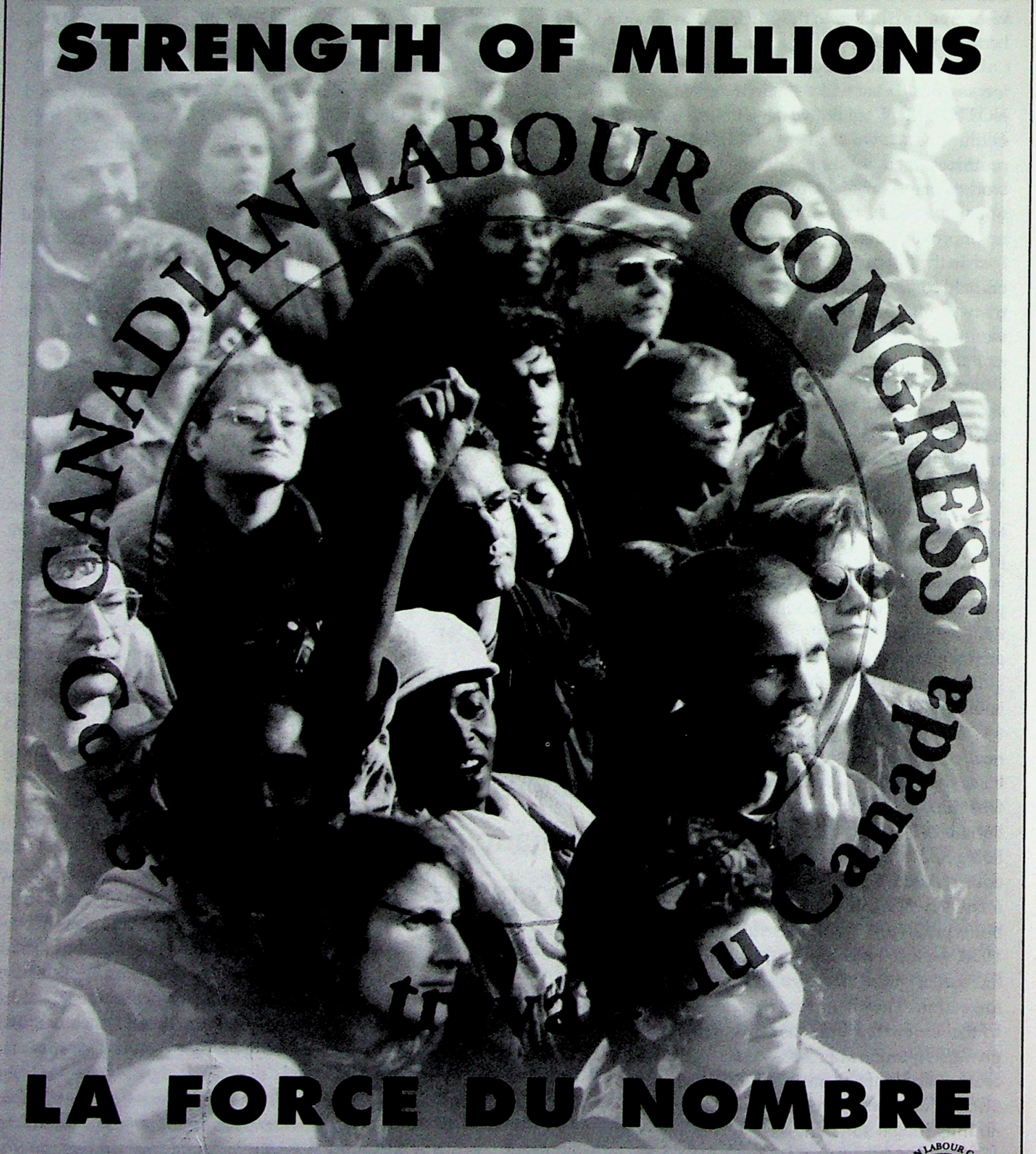
The task remains. Bank workers are still the working women with the power to change the world - to win respect for the skills of clerical workers; to deal with issues like sexual harassment, day care, discrimination; to build an organization that can be a voice for clerical workers in the private sector.

Bank workers will organize. They need a union more than ever, to gain job security, decent wages, a fair system for promotion and transfer. There are many more women in unions, and in union leadership, than there were 20 years ago. Will the trade union movement be ready this time to welcome both bank workers and passionate feminist volunteers? Will the existing unions be prepared to give bank workers the autonomy they will need to organize this industry?

For more information, and a great story, see "An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)" written by participants; available from Press Gang Publishing or from Jean Rands, 2639 Trinity Street, Vancouver, BC V5K 1E5.

Jean Rands has been a clerical worker for 35 years, including seven years in the banking industry. She was a founding member of both SORWUC and AUCE (Association of University Employees), two feminist unions formed in 1972 in Vancouver. Jean is presently a secretary in the BCTF office in Vancouver, and active in the support staff union there.

STRENGTH OF MILLIONS



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The Invisible Economy

Homeworkers, human rights and international labour standards.

by Josephine Savarese

"The union demands were simple and reasonable: less hours, decent pay, and safe, sanitary working conditions. Social insurance - sickness, unemployment, old-age insurance - came much later. When I remember all the hardships suffered and endured, all the sacrifices that were made and how difficult the battles that were fought, it is particularly heartbreaking for me to learn about the proliferation of these primitive sweatshops enslaving the new waves of immigrants today," my aunt wrote in a letter outlining my grandparents' involvement in the New York garment industry.

My grandfather worked as an "underbaster" - basting suits by hand in a factory, while my grandmother worked as a dress operator. According to my aunt, "Conditions were abysmal. Ten, twelve hour days, six days a week, were the norm; they worked in 'sweat' shops, where the heat was unbearable in the summer and the cold was bitter in the winter."

As my aunt suggests, the garment industry is undergoing dramatic changes that threaten to re-institute the oppressive conditions that workers fought hard to eliminate early in the century. Workers and activists are alarmed at the resurgence in homework, a practice that many believed was eradicated. After World War I, the popularity of homeworking dwindled because of union activities, government intervention and the predominance of the factory system.

The globalization of the world economy has resulted in an increasing number of homeworkers in Canada and other parts of the world, particularly in the garment industry. The increase in persons labouring outside traditional employment arrangements is a top agenda item for trade unions, labour organizations and feminists. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that women account for approximately 95 percent of homeworkers. Activists are mobilizing to regulate homebased work because it occurs in the informal economy outside the purview of labour standards legislation.

According to Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, the authors of *Dignity and Daily Bread*: "This undocumented work-force forms an underclass that provides the cheapest form of labour. The exact number of homeworkers is difficult to estimate, as the employers operate illegally on the fringes of the economy, in order to avoid unemployment insurance, minimum wage rates and regulations concerning child labour."

Efforts have been made in recent years to document the number of homeworkers in Canada. A 1993 study by Statistics Canada revealed that the numbers of homebased workers in Metropolitan Toronto doubled between 1981 and 1991. The growth across Canada was 40 percent during

the same time frame. According to Statistics Canada, "this trend will be increasingly important over the next five years."

The garment industry in major urban areas has been particularly affected by this development over the past decade. These workers tend to be "largely invisible," making statistics inconclusive. Studies conducted in Quebec revealed that there were approximately 30,000 garment homeworkers in rural areas. Winnipeg and Vancouver are thought to have a homebased industry, yet more research is needed.

Recent studies indicate that the number of homeworkers is expanding globally. Official reports state that homework is developing swiftly in China, with an estimated 20 million living and working in towns and villages. In urban centres, numbers are even larger.

Illegal homeworkers are essential to the economy of western Europe, particularly in Germany, Holland and the United Kingdom. The underground clothing industry in London was estimated to provide work to 20,000 people by the mid-1980s.

Latin American countries like Mexico, Brazil and Peru are also known to have expanding underground economies. Rough approximations from Colombia reveal an increase in non-standard employment from 13 percent in 1975 to 35 percent in 1980. Asian countries are witnessing similar trends, with homeworkers forming a largely invisible, yet viable economy that operates outside the formal structure.

The participation of children is a documented feature of the homebased industry. The Latin American garment and furniture production industries are reported to rely heavily on under age workers. Young girls in Mexico, many barely school age, produce toys, plastic flowers, cardboard boxes and metalware. In the Philippines, children are employed as domestic workers and seamstresses.

Experts predict that the number of persons in the informal sector will expand as trade barriers between nations diminish, reducing the ability of governments to regulate labour. The operative policies throughout the world are privatization and subcontracting. Transnational corporations wander the globe searching for climates favourable to flexibility and decentralized production.

The efforts of the "global assembly line" are felt in the Third World as well as the First. The reliance upon illegal immigrant workers in the "developed" world is one of the most unsavoury and exploitative aspects of casualized labour. Latin American and Asian women figure prominently among undocumented workers in Toronto, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Homeworkers are driven by poverty to secure low-paid and exploitative work. In the eyes of homeworkers, the wages earned are "better than nothing."

The deleterious effects and rapid growth of homebased work motivated the International Labour Organization to

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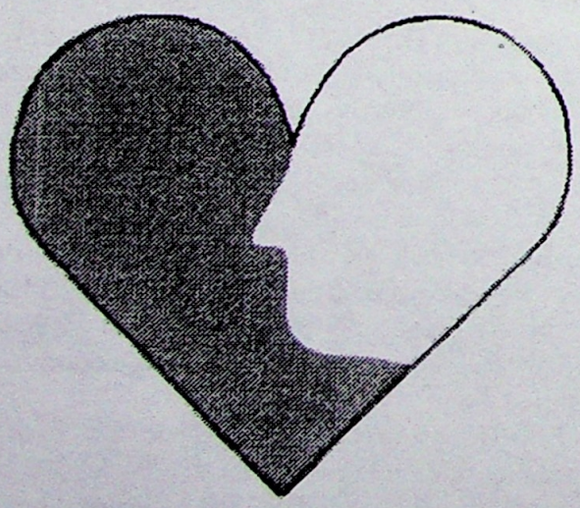
THE UNION OF HEARTS & MINDS



Representing Employees of SaskPower, Prairie Coal, and City of Swift Current.

regulate the informal employment sector. One June 20, 1996, delegates to the 83rd Conference of the ILO ratified a Convention and accompanying Recommendation outlining international labour standards for homework. Representatives approved the Convention against vehement employer opposition, which led to an employer boycott of the final vote in an effort to withhold quorum.

The ILO's attention to this issue is a victory for women. It shows the strength and commitment of feminist activists, who organized internationally with limited financial resources. Further work is required to ensure that countries around the world ratify the Convention and adopt legislation directed toward its goals. HomeNet, The International Network for Homebased Workers states: "Now that a strong and flexible Convention has been passed, it is our responsibility to ensure that it does not remain a beautiful piece of paper (as predicted by the employers). The Homework Convention and Recommendation can now become the basis for organizing at national, regional and local levels to ensure that its articles and provisions become a reality for millions of homeworkers around the world."

The emergence of a global trend towards homework underscores the importance of international strategies. Homework is creating similarities between women workers and is helping to solidify cooperative labour alliances. Furthermore, the Convention and Recommendation encourage the development of worker networks. Article 12 of the Recommendation promotes the establishment of homeworker organizations, including cooperatives. Clause (g) encourages the "creation of centres and networks" to educate homeworkers and to "reduce their isolation."

The most significant provisions of the agreement are:

* **Article 1 (a):** the definition of "homework" refers to work done by a person "referred to as a homeworker" for pay resulting in "a product or service" in a home or location that is not the employer's workplace; the article specifies that homeworkers must lack control over their work and be dependent on an employer.
* **Article (3):** requires members who have ratified the Convention to "adopt, implement and periodically review a national policy on homework" designed to improve the situation of homeworkers; it must be prepared in collaboration with representatives and employees and organizations dealing with homeworkers and their employees, where possible.
* **Article (4):** requires that the national policy on homework promote equality of treatment on a number of grounds including establishing or joining organizations of their choosing, remuneration, minimum age, and maternity protection between homeworkers and other wage earners.
* **Article (5):** states that the national policy on homework shall be accomplished through laws, regulations, collective agreements, arbitration awards or other mechanisms.

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*** Articles (6-8):** mandate the collection of labour statistics, the application of health and safety laws and the circumstances where work in the home is prohibited, and outline the responsibilities of employers and intermediaries.
*** Articles (9 & 10):** require a system of inspection and the availability of appropriate remedies, and state that more generous laws are paramount.

The Recommendation provides further details in relation to occupational health and safety, bargaining collectively, minimum age and other provisions. It requires the removal of impediments to homeworker involvement in organizations, including trade unions. The Recommendation urges member states to promote programs to educate homeworkers on their rights. The Recommendation encourages training opportunities and assistance with the creation of homeworker networks and centres.

A controversial provision, Section 7 (2), mandates that employers keep a registry of homeworkers under their employ. Employer representatives lobbied against the registry, arguing that it would create excessive administrative costs for governments and employers. Trade unionists speculate that employers fought the Convention and Recommendation due to their desire to maintain an inexpensive, flexible labour pool.

Canada will not ratify the Convention without provincial agreement due to the constitutional division of powers mandating joint authority on labour matters. Labour activists are pessimistic about formal acceptance given Canada's traditional reluctance to incorporate ILO guidelines into law. Of the 176 conventions adopted by the ILO, only 27 have been ratified by Canada. Without official endorsement, the ILO Convention is a weak tool for improving the plight of homeworkers.

In the absence of employment legislation, homeworkers labour under harsh conditions. The stress of homework is exacerbated by isolation, long working hours and dependency on "jobbers" who control production. Health problems are common including hypertension, allergic reactions to dust, and chemicals in the fabrics. Homeworkers frequently complain they can never relax because they feel that their work is never finished. Women often work up to 15 hours per day to meet short deadlines. Wages are sometimes as low as 80 cents or less per hour. Undocumented workers are particularly vulnerable. Their illegal status is used to deny them adequate wages and a formal appeal process against exploitative working conditions.

On a more positive note, the Convention on Homework is an important step in providing legal protection to the growing number of homeworkers. While three earlier conventions refer briefly to homeworkers, this is the first time the ILO has addressed employment standards for this sector in such detail. The Convention is a signal to the world that ragpickers, shoemakers and cigarette rollers are legitimate subjects of international law deserving respect and protection. Incorporation of women's voices, a long-standing goal of feminism, is evident in this document. The impetus for the Convention came from the grassroots; it united international women's organizations concerned about the absence of protection for vulnerable workers.

Canadian women are playing an important role in developing new approaches to collective action. For example, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU, now UNITE) has partnered with homeworkers in Toronto to form the Homeworkers Association (HWA). Canadian unions, like UNITE, are adopting a community organizing style where local coalitions advocate for humane, non-exploitative workplaces.

The informal sector, once spurned by trade unions, has become a focal point with activists and workers forming strategic alliances. These outcomes suggest that homework has provided a platform for feminists to advocate for oppressed women, rather than privileged ones.

My grandparents and other garment industry organizers would be proud of their modern counterparts.

Josephine Savarese recently returned to Saskatchewan from Montreal. She is completing a Master's degree at the Institute of Comparative Law at McGill University. The prize awarded by the Andrea Walker Memorial Fund will go to her niece, Maren Francesca, aged two months, for her college fund.

Building a Union

Reflections on organizing in the hospitality industry.

by Paul Clifford
(with the assistance of Jan Kainer)

Some of the members of the Sheraton Gateway organizing committee.

As an experienced organizer in the service sector, and a leader in the Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), I was asked to write about how to organize in the hospitality sector. As I sat down to work on this article, the Mike Harris Tories announced further changes to Ontario's labour laws.

Bill 31, cynically named The Economic Development and Workplace Democracy Act, has plunged Ontario's labour movement into previously uncharted organizing waters. Amongst its anti-union provisions is removing the power of the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a union without a vote by the workers. This power has been applied in instances where the employer has broken the law to such an extent that the true wishes of the employees cannot be established in a further representation vote. Additional insidious aspects of the Tory law include stripping the Board of the power to make interim orders during organizing drives, and allowing employers to use the flimsiest of reasons to have the ballot boxes sealed on the day of the vote until a hearing can resolve disputed issues over the bargaining unit.

Although some aspects of these changes are similar to what exists in Alberta, the total package of changes to the labour law sinks Ontario to the bottom of the barrel - worse than any other jurisdiction in North America. Ontario's Tories have removed the deterrents to employer misconduct during an organizing campaign to such an extent that the Board's power to counteract the employer's intimidation tactics is even less than that of the National Labor Relations Board in the U.S.

So, with such a patchwork of labour legislation across Canada, and with the legislative framework changing drastically, I was presented with the challenging task of extracting the principles of effective organizing in the hospitality industry *regardless* of the legislation which governs the process. Some would call this, at best, an academic exercise, and at worst, a waste of time. Those critics would strike a chord with many in the labour movement by arguing that organizing successfully depends on a union's ability to "sell" its message, combined with skilful tactics and timing, as the union navigates the procedures imposed by labour laws in a specific jurisdiction. That line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that a change in the rules governing organizing can effectively shut down the labour movement's ability to organize. Certainly conservatives and employers hope this is so.

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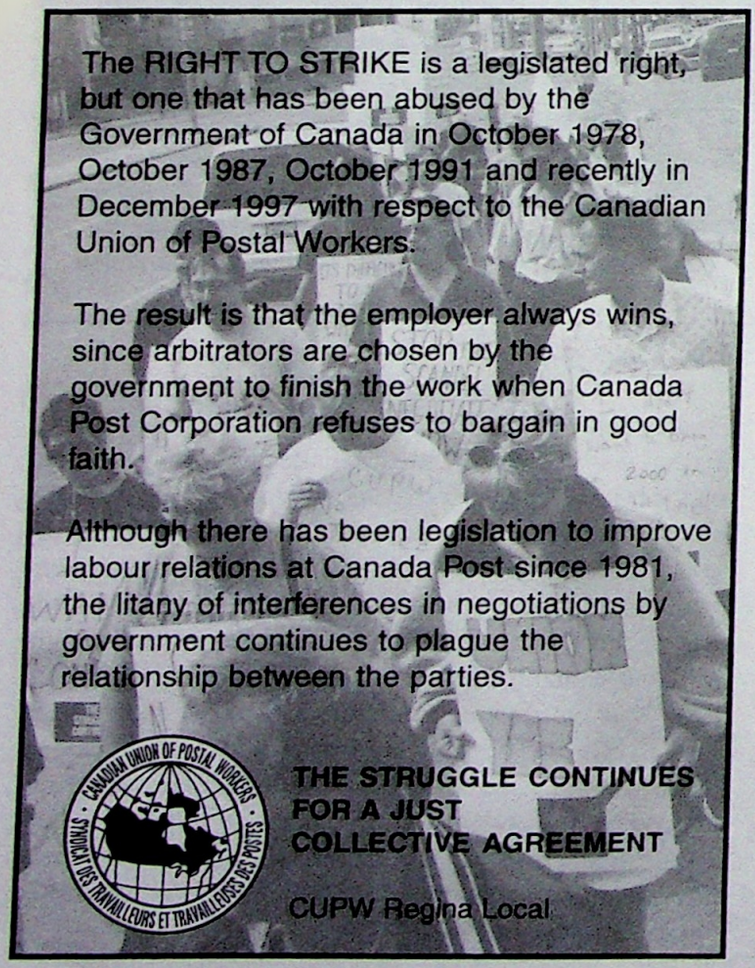


On the other hand, there are some of us who believe that regardless of the so-called rules, the labour movement can "build unions" - even with lower-wage, service workers who need unions the most, even though they face the greatest obstacles. In spite of the fact that these workers' standards of living are being eroded, and that they occupy a vulnerable place in the economic scheme of things, with the right approach, they can be organized. What works is a comprehensive "union-building" program that marshals significant resources to the task.

In my view, there are some basic fundamentals to organizing - and to union-building. I want to focus on three critical aspects of forming a union. The first revolves around principles of respect and dignity as the impulse for organizing. The second examines the union organizing committee as the basis for leadership recruitment and involvement, and the third stresses the importance of engaging workers in action. At a recent organizing drive at an airport hotel in Toronto, all three of these issues emerged in the campaign.

As will become clear, organizing is going to take longer and the campaigns will be more involved than before. But if we want to build a solid base from within to withstand external pressures from employers, such as strong anti-union campaigns, greater efforts around union-building and creating a workers' community at the grass-roots level will be absolutely necessary. Forming a union is not a mechanical, technical or legal process. It is building a workplace organization through which workers find strength in each other and are able to take action.

Fighting for Respect

From my experience in the hospitality industry, I have learned that the desire for respect is the impulse that drives people to organize. In this industry, injustices and inequalities are rampant, and there is a sharp contrast between the hospitality workers' lives, their living and working conditions, compared to the life-styles of the customers they serve, and the managers and owners they work for. Fighting for respect is the glue that holds the organizing campaign together.

In the hospitality industry workers face disrespect every day - from their boss and the customers and guests. In fact, the conventional model of a good service worker is someone who can handle disrespect, including abuse from clientele, and continue to serve. In this work context, pushing for respect and dignity is compelling; it carries resonance for workers. I have seen people willing to make sacrifices to demand respect, yet they may feel ambivalent over fighting for more money or better benefits. Sometimes seeking higher wages can be bound up with feelings of greed, yet respect and dignity are noble impulses in people, and are better organizing tools than fighting for a particular grievance or issue, even if the grievance in huge. Of course,

poor pay and inadequate benefits are a sign of an employer's disrespect, and a successful campaign is able to package the fight to improve compensation as a battle for respect.

Finally, respect only comes with power. And power only comes when workers have an organization within, and you build power within the workplace. You can't really have respect until you have power through organizing a union. True respect is when employers treat workers as if they matter. Respect is fundamental to building a union.

Organizing the Sheraton Gateway

On June 3, 1998 a two-thirds majority of nearly 200 workers at the Sheraton Gateway hotel in Toronto's International Airport voted to join HERE Local 75. Anne Healey, the union's lead organizer, observed that over the six month campaign, "respect" emerged as the key issue. She says, "they first came to us with specific issues - individual anger at a manager's treatment, more money, and a fear that some senior people would lose their jobs as the hotel went through restructuring. But as we built and trained the organizing committee, we were able to draw out from them much deeper and more powerful anger over disrespect and injustice which they gave voice to. At committee meetings we asked them to talk about what the organizing drive was really about. Most became quite eloquent talking about respect and dignity. This was necessary in order for them to unify their co-workers around feelings and experiences most of them shared."

The Organizing Committee

Another key component of building a union is the organizing committee. While a lot of people would undoubtably agree with me that an organizing committee is central to forming a union, what I want to emphasize is that it is essential to establish the committee as *the union*. It isn't the primary role of the committee to follow mechanical steps on the road to union certification. Rather, the committee will be able to recruit their co-workers if they are effective role models for others.

To the workers in a non-union workplace, "the union" is the committee. That is who they watch, they judge, and they talk to. And, depending on the stage of the organizing drive, co-workers either follow or run away from the committee.

These active committee members set an example and foster self-confidence in their co-workers. For this reason, it is imperative that organizers choose committee members carefully. Good organizers are perceptive about a worker's personality and character and where they fit in the organizing drive. And everybody fits - it's not an exclusive club - there is a role for everybody. But it is crucial that an organizer make sound judgements about "the leaders" who are organizing their co-workers.

Organizers need to have clear expectations as to what the committee, and its members, are supposed to do and when they should do it. Sometimes the task can be very simple. At other times, it can be quite involved. But it is almost always risky. Overcoming fear is the ongoing struggle for the organizing committee, and eventually the workers. For example, the task at hand could be as simple as telling everyone in your department that you are on the organizing committee, including co-workers you don't trust. The lesson learned here is that if you're not afraid of your co-workers, you're not afraid of the boss.

> Organizing is not good salesmanship, or good packaging, or even smart tactical maneuvering. Good organizing is building a good union.

At times, a tension exists between the union organizer and the organizing committee in terms of pushing them to see themselves as leaders. For example, on most drives, workers wish to apply for certification before they are ready. The experienced organizer knows how strong an employer's anti-union campaign will be and is responsible for preparing workers to withstand it and win. It is the organizer's job to adequately develop their skills as leaders. The organizer's control is "undemocratic" because the organization hasn't been established yet.

On the Sheraton Gateway campaign, the organizers had set a goal of 75 percent signed union cards before applying for the vote. After five months we had achieved only 65 percent, but the organizing committee had become strong and confident. Some were doing regular house visits on their own. They argued that they would win and hold onto all their votes. The organizers challenged them, saying they wouldn't win in the face of the anti-union campaign in the days before the vote. The committee insisted they could win. After an assessment, the decision was made to go to the vote. The committee held all their votes and won!

Union organizers have to convey the idea that the union is already in the workplace - that workers are not joining something that is external, that they are not simply filling out an application form, or voting for a "third party." During organizing campaigns, HERE often brings leaders from other workplaces who feel they have personally won

respect through union activity. Non-union Sheraton Gateway workers got a boost from eight strong union members from the larger Sheraton Centre Hotel. They didn't list grievances won, or brag about the union, but talked about "standing up" to the employer and that forming a union means they rely on themselves for support and leadership. In this way, we began to build solidarity and power between workplaces.

Taking Action

A third factor, related to the organizing committee, is that a union is workers in action. Committee people lead by example. Leaders do not just lead with their mouths, or with their pens, or by distributing union literature. Union leaders must develop into people who engage in action. The jargon we use at HERE Local 75 is "pushing the workers into action." A good organizer is not a slick talker but someone who pushes hard - someone who doesn't allow workers to take the easy path to failure, but pushes workers along the tough road to victory. Like all unionization drives, during the Sheraton Gateway campaign, the organizers had to struggle with the committee to do more than they thought they were capable of or wished to do. "Why doesn't the union send out a mailing or leaflet or ...?", they'd ask Anne Healey. She knew that the biggest obstacle to union organizing is fear, and that the only way to successfully overcome fear is to push people through it because if they don't solve a problem that is risky, they will be scared again.

During organizing we are often asked for guarantees. We return, again, to the issues of respect and dignity. We tell them that we cannot give respect to them, nor can anybody else, it is something fought for. If you want respect, you have to fight for it, without any guarantees.

As times get tougher, and as progressive labour laws disappear, organizations will have to adjust to the new labour relations reality. As we organize new workplaces, we have to be strong enough to withstand the pressures and challenges that lie ahead. Organizing is not good salesmanship, or good packaging, or even smart tactical maneuvering. Good organizing is building a good union. Workers have to have confidence to win organizing campaigns. How one organizes, and the principles brought to bear in an organizing drive, will make or break a union. The foundation of union-building is fighting for power and organization in the workplace. That's what we've learned in the hospitality sector, and if the labour movement is to grow, we believe more organizing as union-building, will be necessary.

Luis Aguiar and Jan Kainer interviewed Paul Clifford about organizing in the hospitality sector. That discussion forms the basis of this article. Paul Clifford is the president-administrator of Local 75 of the Hotel Employees, Restaurant Employees Union.

Human Rights

Celebration & Challenge

Bob White's
Labour Day Message

Around the world this year, the Labour Movement is reflecting on the importance of two documents which mark their 50th anniversaries this year.

In 1948, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Trade Unions were codified in the International Labour Organization's "Convention 87." In that same year, the United Nations adopted the extraordinarily far-sighted Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Declaration, drafted by Canadian John Humphrey, defined human rights and bound signatory nations to respect them. The inherent freedom and fundamental dignity of all human beings was asserted and discrimination on the basis of race and gender were prohibited. The Declaration also established the right to decent working conditions, fair pay, protection against unemployment and other social protections. Echoing Convention 87, which was passed just months before, the right to form and join trade unions was guaranteed in Article 23 of the Declaration, affirming the labour movement's assertion that *trade union rights are universal human rights.*

During the three decades that followed their adoption, these documents helped provide the inspiration as well as the conceptual framework for labour and social legislation for many countries around the globe. In Canada, social legislation such as Old Age Security, legislation governing the conditions of work and the treatment of workers, as well as federal and provincial human rights laws themselves, were profoundly influenced by the Declaration and Convention 87. Today, the power of these documents is reflected in the recent decision by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal requiring the federal government to rectify gender-based wage discrimination for 200,000 public service workers.

50 years later, human and trade union rights continue

to be violated in many countries around the world.

For example, the spread of export processing zones across Africa has been accomplished by increased exploitation of the work-force (including delays in the payment of wages), and by government refusals to negotiate with workers' representatives. In some Latin American countries, where neo-liberal policies have accentuated inequalities, repression of trade unions continues unabated and is virtually unpunished. In Colombia alone, 156 trade unionists were killed in 1997.

Asian trade unionists have been imprisoned for denouncing the unbridled growth of capitalism. In the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the countries of the former Soviet Union, employers simply refuse to pay workers the wages they're due.

In Canada, the business lobby has convinced some governments to roll back labour legislation and social safety protections for workers and their families. In fact, in recent years the ILO has condemned a number of Canadian governments for violating Convention 87, particularly as it applies to public-sector workers.

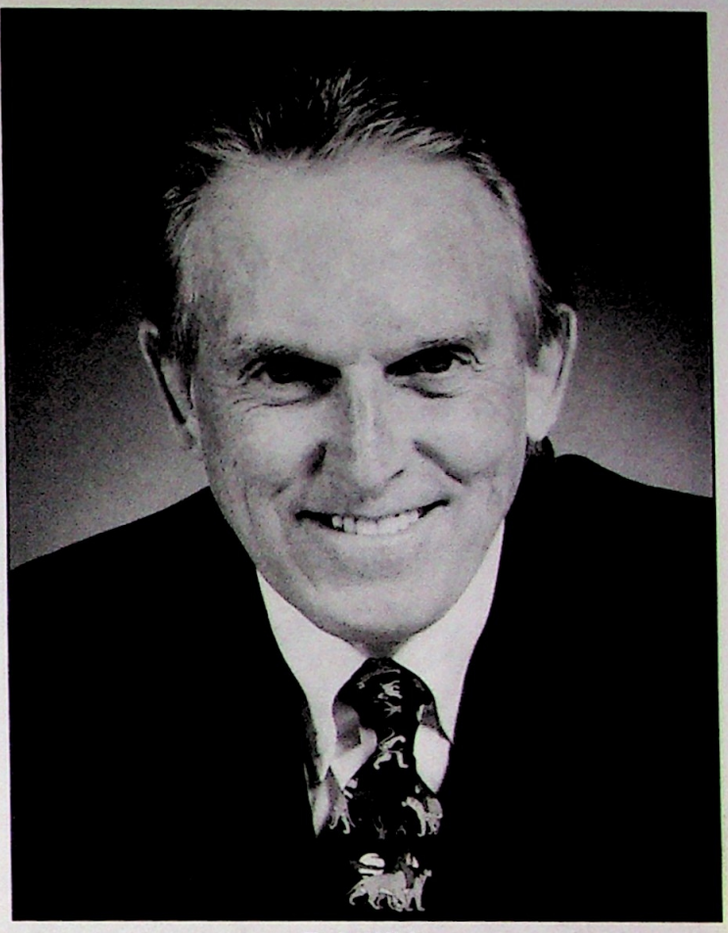
The last 50 years have, on the whole, seen significant gains by workers, but we are rightly concerned with each attack on our rights and the erosion of our standard of living that each attack brings. As we renew our dedication to the cause of defending and extending workers' rights and employment standards as laid out in the UN Declaration, we have reason to look optimistically toward the next decade and the next century.

Our hopes are buoyed by the reality that the network of workers' organizations around the world is growing stronger; that more workers' organizations are members of regional and international labour institutions like the Western Hemisphere's labour organization ORIT and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; these central labour bodies are so closely linked that a major rights violation occurring in the morning is known by unions and human rights organizations around the world that afternoon.

From Indonesian factory labourers to Australian dock workers, from Ghanian miners to Mexican auto-parts workers to public-service employees in Canada, international solidarity has new meaning and will be a powerful force for making universal human rights a reality in the 21st Century.

Recall the international pressure brought to bear on Nike and on soccer ball manufacturers for child- and sweatshop labour practices. Both the company and the industry, after first denying the charges, have taken measures in response to this international pressure - they know we're watching.

Remember the Indonesian trade-union leader Muchtar Pakpahan, who, along with dozens of colleagues, was imprisoned for "disrupting stability." Muchtar, who attended the last CLC convention, and many other activists were released by a brutal government primarily because of pressure mounted by the *international* labour and human rights movement. These are small but significant steps.



Bob White
photo: Photo Features Limited

As international solidarity grows, so must the power of workers to organize effective international campaigns that will win recognition for human rights, more justice, and better lives in the next century for working people around the world.

Bob White is the President of the Canadian Labour Congress.

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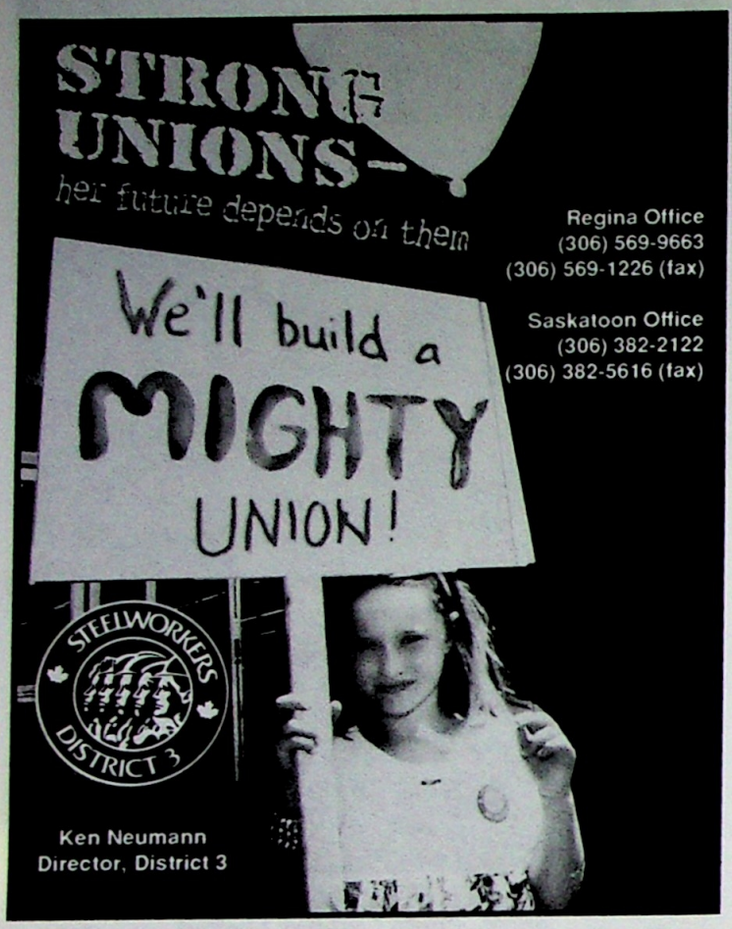

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Back to School Pop Quiz!

1. Which of the following groups has been denied access to protection under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act?

a) Corporations that owe billions of dollars in deferred taxes or government-guaranteed loans.
b) Students who are faced with increasing tuition fees, enormous debt loads and high unemployment rates.
c) Ex-CEO's of companies that seek protection under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act while laying-off thousands of workers.

2. Which is the best strategy to ensure access to post-secondary education for all Canadians?

a) ***the Federal Liberal Strategy***: a Millennium Fraud (er, Fund) that will help only 7% of students annually; discriminatory changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act; and restrictions on student loan eligibility based on personal credit history.
b) ***the Canadian Federation of Students' Strategy***: a national tuition fee freeze; an end to deregulated and differential tuition fees; reinvestment in social programs via increased transfer payments to the provinces; and a comprehensive system of national grants.
c) ***the Neo-Liberal Strategy***: private, for-profit universities and colleges; income contingent loan repayment schemes; and full deregulation of tuition fees.

If you answered (b) to both questions, stand up in your classroom or in your workplace and join the 400,000 members of the Canadian Federation of Students for the Pan-Canadian Week of Action, October 13-16, 1998.

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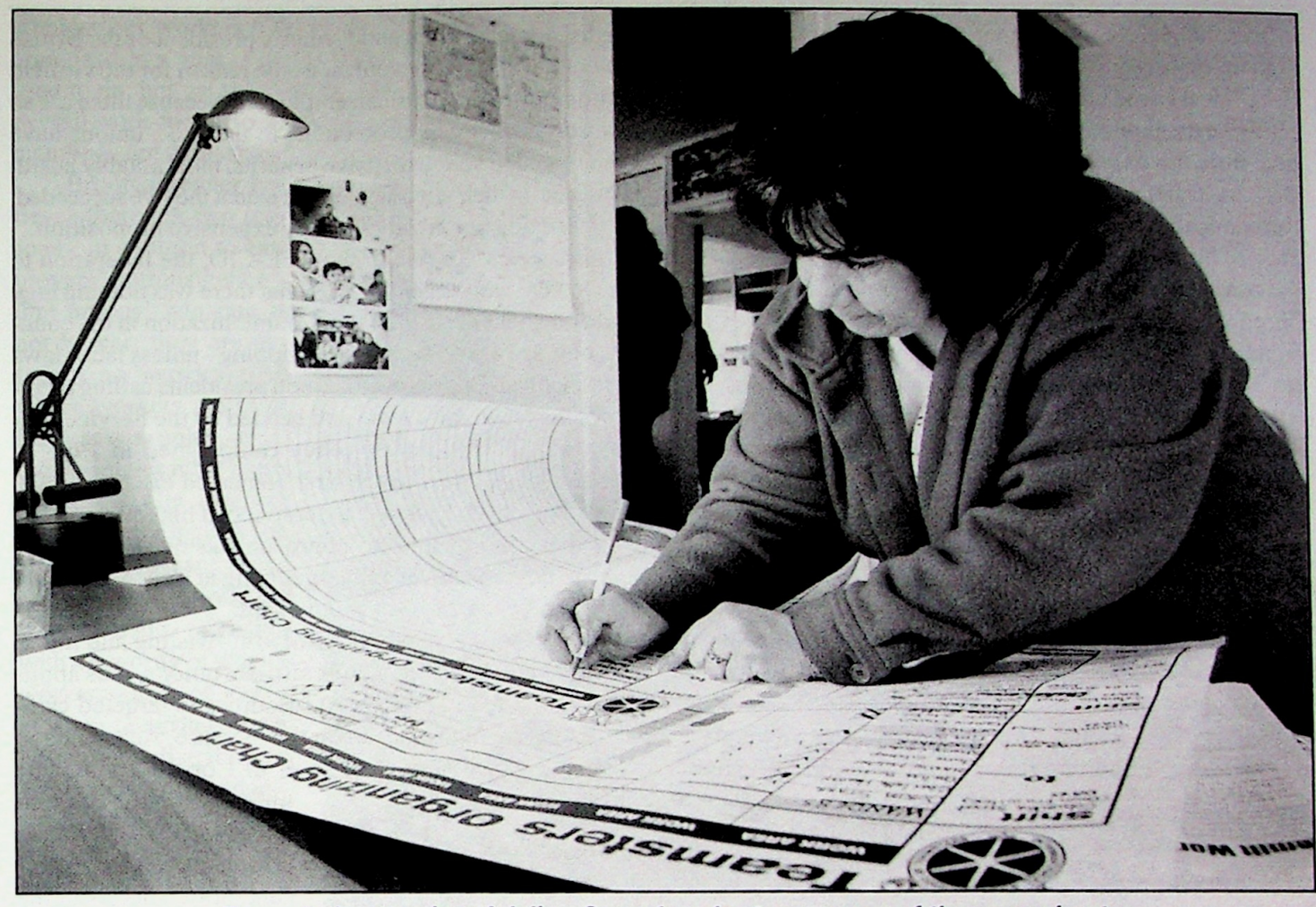
correct answers: 1.b), 2.b)



Teamster's organizer Adelina Gonzales charts progress of the campaign to organize apple packing house workers in Washington State.
photos: Jim West

Organizing the Unorganized

The U.S. experience.

by Jane Slaughter

At a union rally last year in Wenatchee, Washington, apple warehouse worker Roberto Guerrero told the crowd how he came from Mexico to the United States. He travelled, he said, with several other immigrants stacked between sheets of plywood in the back of a truck. The Mexicans joked to each other, that if they died on the way, at least they were already in their coffins.

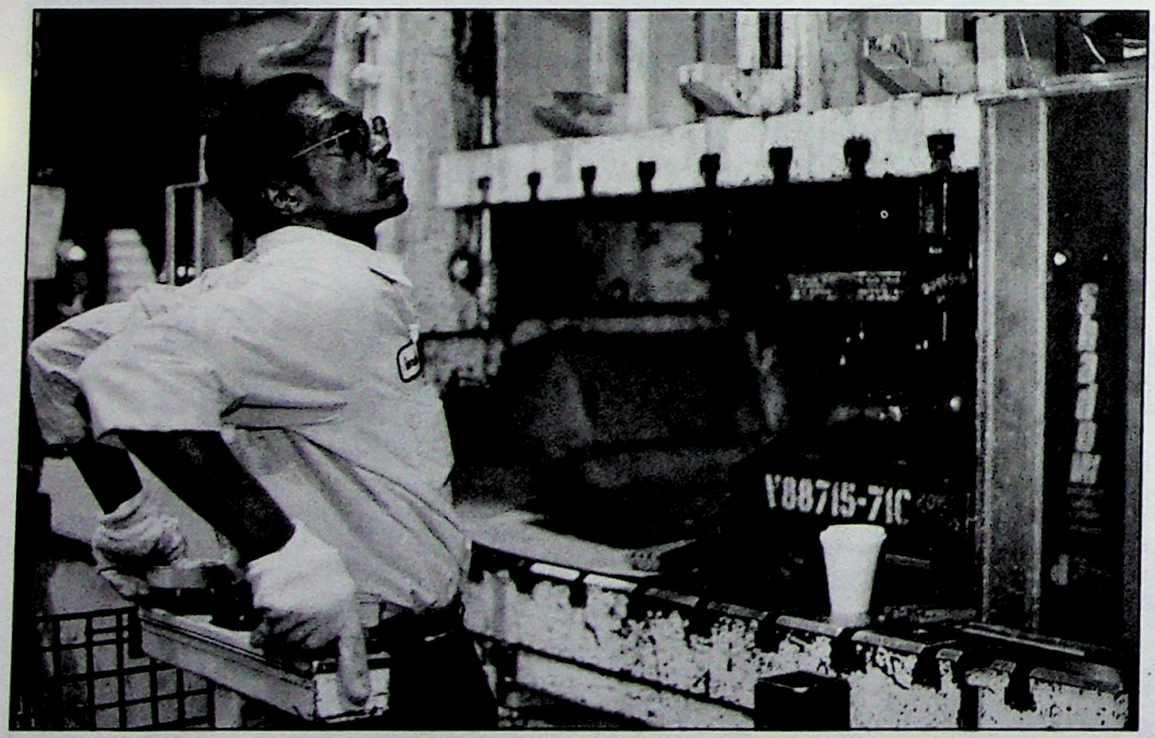
Guerrero found work with a huge Washington fruit grower, Stemilt, Inc. After eight years on the job, with raises of 10 cents a year, he was still earning only $8.41 an hour sorting apples and pears and stacking heavy boxes. It wasn't enough to support his five children, so Guerrero, now a

citizen, helped convince a majority of his fellow workers to sign union cards.

"I feel so sad how they treat my people," says Guerrero. "It's like the Indians a long time ago. They [the employers] give little things, and my people give them the gold."

As it happens, Stemilt held on to its gold - cheap labor. Refusing to acknowledge the majority of cards signed, Stemilt insisted on a government-supervised election, as is the company's right under U.S. law. Management waged a fierce anti-union campaign, complete with firings of key organizers and "captive audience meetings," ones that workers are required to attend. The Teamsters union lost the vote by a small margin, appealed to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and hopes, eventually, for an order to re-run the election.

The Stemilt case is thoroughly typical of what happens in union organizing drives in the U.S. today, from worker bravery to employer illegalities. Since 1986 the proportion of employers running aggressive campaigns with multiple anti-union tactics, such as discharges, threats of plant closing, captive audience meetings, and electronic surveillance, has increased from 22 percent to 42 percent. Largely because employers contest organizing so fiercely, unions win only half of representation elections. And only 60 percent of those victories ever result in a signed contract with the employer, down from 75 percent ten years ago. The sluggish workings of the NLRB protect employers or delay justice until workers give up.



Auto parts being produced at Superb Manufacturing, an independent auto parts plant in Detroit.

Elaine Bernard, now executive director of the Harvard Trade Union Program and formerly president of the British Columbia NDP, points out an ironic reason for the virulent anti-unionism of American employers: because there are so few universal social protections in the U.S., unions have been forced to seek expensive benefits, most notably health insurance, in their contracts. To the extent they've succeeded, they've made unionization a very expensive proposition.

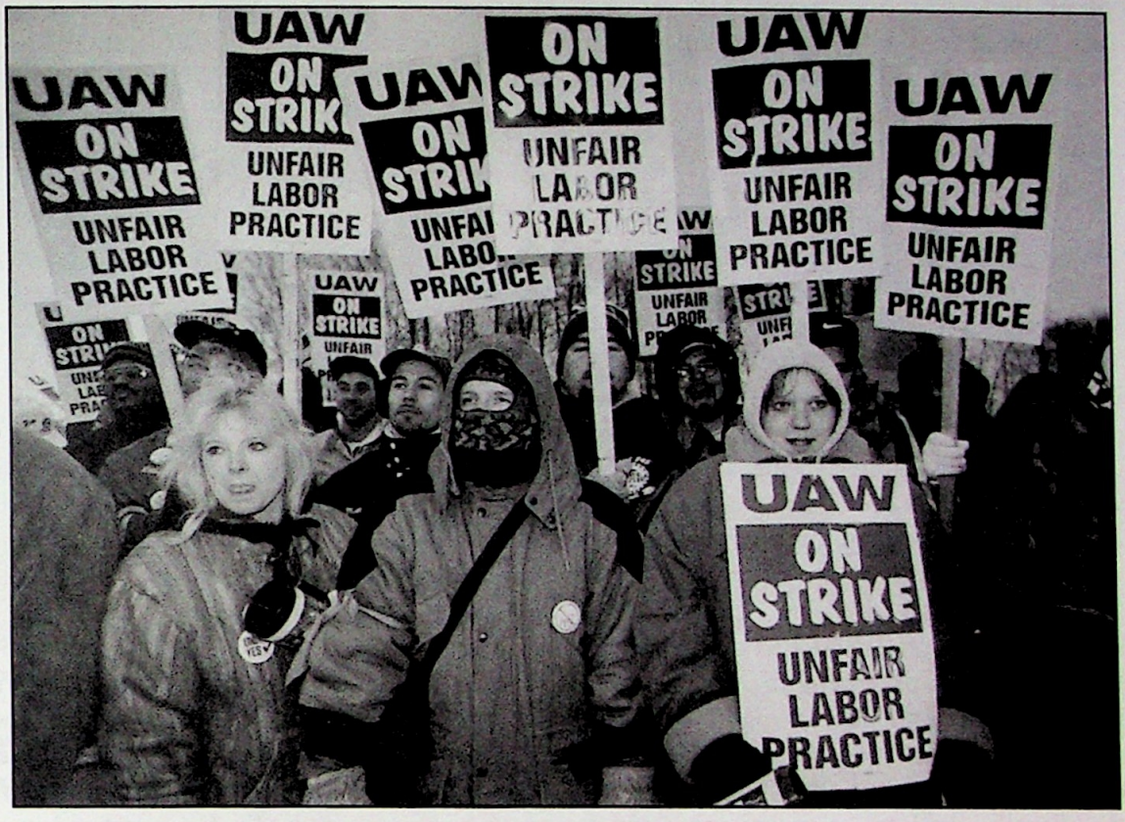
For years, leaders of the AFL-CIO, the federation to which most unions belong, held that there was nothing they could do about the dismal level of unionization in the country - now at 14 percent and still slipping - unless labor laws were changed. But a group of union presidents calling themselves the New Voice team and headed by the Service Employees' (SEIU) John Sweeney campaigned in 1995 to change that outlook. In the first contested election in the federation's history, Sweeney convinced his fellow presidents that a more vigorous approach was needed. "We're going to pour resources into organizing at a pace and scale that is unprecedented," he proclaimed.

After two and a half years of arm-twisting and moral suasion among the AFL-CIO's affiliate unions, plus application of the federation's own resources to targeted campaigns, organizing is indeed on the increase. According to research by Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, unions won 12 percent more elections and gained representation for 15 percent more workers in the first half of 1997 than during the same period in 1996 (in elections conducted by the NLRB, which covers most but not all private-sector workers). Unions have also won some big victories outside the NLRB: 10,000 USAirways ticket agents, 9,500 teachers in Dallas, 4,000 home health aides organized by SEIU, 5,000 mechanics at Continental Airlines, and 4,000 Las Vegas hotel workers.

Hopeful as these figures are, the gains are a drop in the bucket compared to the task labor has set itself. First to acknowledge this fact is Richard Bensinger, former director of the AFL-CIO's Organizing Department. "Last year was the best in a long time," says Bensinger, "but it was thanks to just eight or nine affiliates." He mentions the Teamsters, the Com-

munications Workers (CWA), SEIU. "A figure of 410,000 organized in a year is good compared to the 250,000 we used to do, but we still lost two-tenths of a percent of the overall work-force. To get power, we need millions of new members, not thousands."

Bronfenbrenner believes there are two reasons - in addition to employers' intransigence - that unions' win rate is not higher: they are not targeting workplaces where workers are most likely to vote union, or using the tactics most likely to prevail. Her research has shown the highest win rates in health care, social services, education, and entertainment - industries with a majority of women workers - and the lowest in manufacturing, warehouse and distribution, food processing, and utility industries, particularly in units where men predominate. Despite these numbers, unions continue to focus over two-thirds of their organizing activity in blue-collar units in manufacturing, transportation, warehouse, and construction.



UAW members strike Johnson Controls' auto parts plant in suburban Detroit, attempting to win a first contract. The plant makes seats which Ford formerly made in-house.

Here a central question of organizing strategy arises: given finite resources, should unions be looking for new members in the most likely sectors (public employees, for example, have the highest win rates of all, mostly due to less employer opposition), or should they concentrate on their traditional jurisdictions in order to increase union density within specific industries? Stephen Lerner, who's headed organizing for SEIU and now works with construction workers, says, "Many unions are correctly saying that you don't build power and workers can't make significant changes in their lives economically unless you control an industry. If we lose control of our industry, our wages go down the toilet. So some unions are refocusing on their industries."

Lerner cites the SEIU's stress on organizing health care workers and the Steelworkers' on the mini-mills that compete with the big steel manufacturers. The building trades unions, says Lerner, have put 100,000 members through their COMET (Committee on Membership Education and Training) program to create a "culture of organizing." One result is that in Las Vegas 15 trades are now jointly undertaking a massive campaign to organize the entire booming construction industry there, bypassing the NLRB election process.

"But some unions are organizing anybody they can in an attempt to shore up their numbers," says Lerner. "They're not thinking it through."

Thus the Laborers recruit practical nurses; the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) go after doctors; the Mine Workers take in university employees, while the coal industry is over half non-union. And unions seek to grow by merging with existing unions rather than finding new members: The Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers merges with SEIU rather than seeking unity with other railroad unions. The United Auto Workers (UAW) take in the National Writers Union but do next to no organizing in the largely non-union auto parts industry (although the UAW is showing some signs that this policy will change). More and more unions become "general unions," with little bargaining power in any of the many industries their members belong to.

Bronfenbrenner's other reproach to unions is that they ignore the body of evidence that suggests some organizing tactics work better than others. "Union tactics play a more important role in determining election outcomes than any

other group of factors," says Bronfenbrenner, including type of employer, type of worker, or employer tactics. Unions that run rank-and-file-based campaigns - including person-to-person contact in housecalls and small group meetings, an active organizing committee that is representative of the work-force, on-the-job pressure tactics, volunteer organizers from already-unionized workplaces, and building for the first contract even before the union is recognized - enjoy win rates as high as 64 percent. This is nearly double the win rate in units where unions do not use such a comprehensive union-building strategy.

Why, then, do unions stick with losing tactics, such as having staff organizers leaflet the plant gates? Some are looking for the "silver bullet," says Bronfenbrenner - a magical tactic such as flying squads of professional organizers to visit workers in their homes and bypass forming a rank-and-file committee. For some, it's ignorance or an inability to discard old ways or old staffers. And some unions may shun the construction of strong, active, militant committees of rank-and-filers because they are not accustomed to, and in many cases are frightened of, building the kind of new unions that this would imply: democratically controlled and bottom-up. After all, it's been many years since most American union leaders have trusted rank-and-filers to make decisions on their own behalf. Officers may be so used to thinking of their members as passive - much less unorganized potential members - that they don't believe this kind of organizing can be done.

Finally, the kind of organizing drive described here implies mobilizing against the *employer* in a way that many unions are not comfortable with. Most are far more used to having their members lobby the legislature for a company tax break than encouraging shop-floor showdowns.

Thus there are many reasons why, even with some unions putting increased money and staff time into organizing the unorganized, that these expanded resources are not yet producing spectacular results.

One strategy discussed enthusiastically in organizing circles these days is "bargaining to organize." This means convincing existing unionized employers, at the bargaining table, to remain neutral when the union targets their non-union operations. When employers are neutral, workers almost always go with the union. This tactic has had some success in the telecommunications industry, where the CWA has convinced AT&T and some regional carriers to remain neutral when CWA goes after their wireless phone and internet divisions.

The drawback to this strategy, of course, is that it applies only to a certain subset of (usually large) employers. And it can be used only if the union is willing either to use its clout in bargaining to convince the company, say by striking, or to give up other possible contract gains. At Kaiser Permanente, the huge health maintenance organization, the AFL-CIO won a neutrality pledge but in return agreed to "market" Kaiser as a health care provider - essentially cutting off the unions' ability to criticize Kaiser's downsizing and speedups. The advantage of "bargaining to organize," on the other hand, is that it focuses on maintaining union power in a strategic, industry-specific sense. Bensinger says members are willing to make neutrality pledges a major bargaining goal, even if wage increases take a back seat. "Members understand that the growth of a non-union sector in their industry directly affects their paychecks," he says.

There's no question that John Sweeney has succeeded in putting organizing back on labor's agenda. If winning new members is not yet every union's top priority in practice, it's at least the topic that all feel obliged to pay more attention to. Perhaps the missing piece, however, is the untapped potential of the already organized. Someone once said, "Unions don't organize workers. Workers organize unions." An army of professional organizers can win a few thousand new recruits, but it will take the active participation of hundreds of thousands of union members to build a movement that can inspire millions of their fellow workers to join them.

At the end of the day, what will convince workers to go out on a limb, risking their jobs, to organize *themselves* to confront the boss? It's talking among themselves, and with other people like themselves, that will convince workers to take that stand, not seeing an ad on TV (another favored AFL-CIO strategy) or reading a web page, or listening to a professional organizer's rap.

But, all too often, the potential volunteer organizers - ordinary rank-and-file members - are not enthusiastic about their own unions. Members are not likely to spend their weekends on housecalls to potential recruits until they believe that their union belongs to them and not to its officials. To this end - although he would deny it - the struggling movements for democracy and reform that exist in a half-dozen unions (UAW, UFCW, Teamsters, SEIU, Letter Carriers, Machinists) are an essential element of the boost to organizing that John Sweeney seeks. Only so much can be done with money and staff; to grow, and not just hold their own, unions will need their members on their side.

Roberto Guerrero understands these simple truths of unionism well. A Pentecostal Christian, he quotes the *Bible* to make his points. "Ecclesiastes says the union is good, you know," he contends. "It says, 'If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.'

"That is the union. If I go in front of the boss, he fires me, but if we go with 20 or 40 or 50 guys together, he don't fire us so easy."

Jane Slaughter is a labor writer in Detroit.

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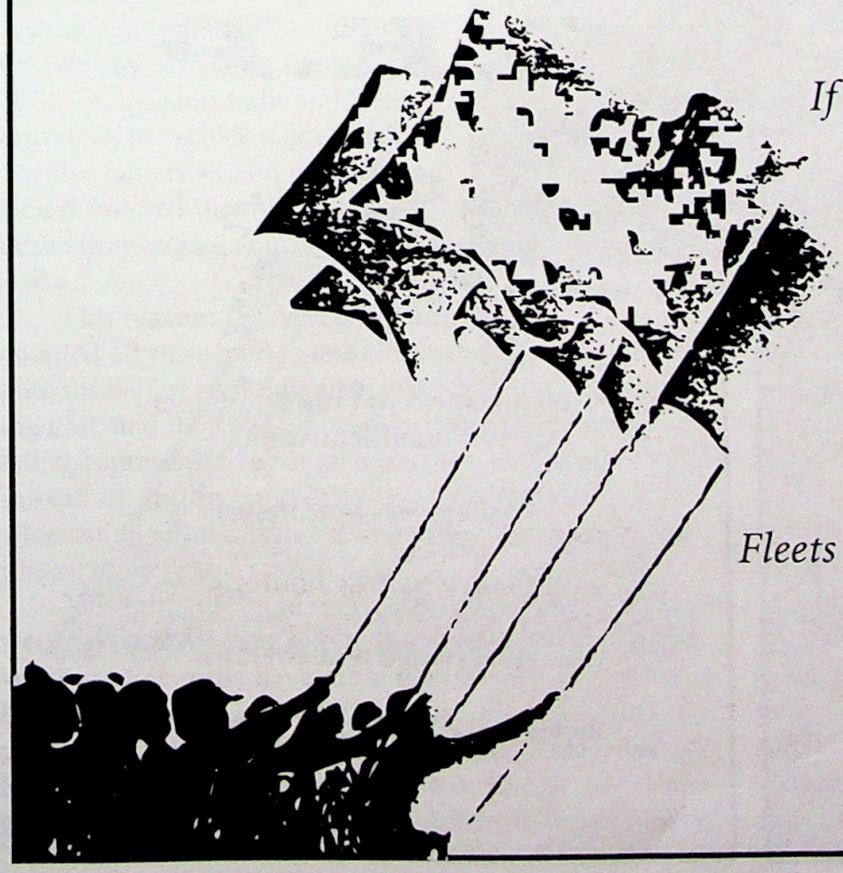

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Broader-based Organizing

Can it benefit workers?

by Bob Hatfield & David Durning

CEP members on strike against Abitibi-Consolidated in Kenora, Ontario.
photo: Daily Miner and News

In May 1998, members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) voted 95 percent in favour of strike action against paper giant Abitibi-Consolidated, Inc. But when the workers at the Fort Francis, Fort William, Iroquois Falls and Kenora mills took to the picket lines on June 15, the Ontario Labour Relations Board ordered them to "cease and desist from engaging in an unlawful strike."

The reason: the workers had counted all their ballots in a single pile, instead of counting them bargaining unit by bargaining unit, and they had all been insisting that the employer talk to representatives of all the workers at the same table, instead of mill by mill. After all, negotiating together is what union solidarity is all about, but the Board ruled it illegal.

The ballot problem was quickly resolved. New votes were taken at all four mills. The six bargaining units involved (some mills have more than one unit) voted from 88.9 percent to 99.3 percent in favour of strike action. The problem of meeting at the same table is harder to solve. The law says workers must negotiate bargaining unit by bargaining unit, unless the employer agrees to broader-based bargaining.

CEP vice-president Cec Makowski expressed his concern. "We have negotiated as groups since the Second World War and the process has served the parties quite well. I find it unfortunate that the process is now being questioned by the company."

So Abitibi-Consolidated Inc., the largest newsprint corporation in the world, was able to insist that its workers meet it on a mill by mill basis. The irony is that the company was only formed last year when Abitibi-Price and Stone-Consolidated merged. No one asked the workers whether they were in favour of this merger, which increased the employer's bargaining strength considerably. So, the

employer can use its corporate muscle, but the workers are fragmented by law.

Public sector workers face the same problem. The Public Service Alliance of Canada negotiates on behalf of approximately 40 bargaining units with Treasury Board. Only if the employer agrees can they negotiate at common tables.

Trade union organizing, certification and bargaining in Canada, modeled on the American Wagner Act from the 1940s, is controlled by a legislative framework that defines "appropriate bargaining units" and presumes that organizing and bargaining occur on a plant by plant or office by office level. This framework is usually applied in such a way that workers are organized or defragmented into the smallest possible unit. Generally speaking, it has not been applied at a broader-based, sectoral or regional level, but there are situations when a broader-based approach could benefit workers and unions.

The employer can use its corporate muscle, but the workers are fragmented by law.

B.C. labour lawyer Diane MacDonald, a broader-based organizing advocate, says: "The New Deal model encourages decentralized bargaining and the fragmentation of the working class by encouraging bargaining to occur at the level of the individual workplace. This fragmentation results in some working people (predominately white men) having the opportunity to engage in collective bargaining while for other individuals (predominately women and people of colour) collective bargaining rights are illusory."

MacDonald suggests that to overcome this bias, there is a need for collective bargaining across workplaces. This would allow workers employed in different plants, but working for the same employer, to avoid the problems the CEP members at Abitibi-Consolidated are facing. It would also allow individuals employed by different employers within a particular occupational sector or geographical location to bargain collectively with their employers.

Labour relations boards across the country use a standard criterion of "community of interest" in determining the scope of a bargaining unit. MacDonald suggests that the community of interest test usually reflects the way the employer is organized rather than the associational rights of workers. The community of interest test is of particular concern when it comes to casual, temporary, seasonal, or less than full-time workers. Many labour board decisions regarding scope exclude these workers due to not having a "sufficient continuing interest" in the workplace.

One possible solution for providing certification and bargaining rights to workers could be through a sectoral or broader-based approach. This would allow a bargaining unit certification to cover all workers in a particular sector or geographical area, regardless of their employer. For example, fast food service workers in Saskatoon, taxi drivers in Prince George or logging truck drivers in northern Ontario could all be organized under a common certification order.

Surprisingly, an example of this does exist, courtesy of an employer. Unfortunately, it was done to keep unions out, not to bring the benefits of unions to more workers. In Nova Scotia, a French multinational established two tire plants. Workers at one showed interest in becoming unionized. The workers at the other plant were less inclined to join. The corporation used its economic clout to persuade the government to pass special legislation, the "Michelin Bill," to force the union to win a majority at both plants before it could be certified. This effectively prevented unionization.

There are few examples today of formal sectoral certifications, but there are examples of unions working informally in a broader-based approach. These usually occur in large established sectors such as automobile production, oil and gas refining and pulp and paper production. The Canadian Auto Workers and the CEP, the dominant unions in those sectors, have histories of negotiating master agreements within a sector and either having the agreement extended to all sectoral workplaces or establish a pattern which sets bargaining trends in the sector.

CEP workers at Abitibi-Consolidated have been selected by their union to establish the paper industry pattern in the current round of negotiations. Their settlement will set the pattern for 25,000 workers from Newfoundland to Manitoba.

These types of bargaining structures are the exception rather than the rule, however, and even these are being challenged by employers on a regular basis. The experience in these sectors seems to indicate that broader-based organizing or bargaining only happens as long as employers are convinced it is in their own best interests.

We don't hear about pattern bargaining or master agreements for child care workers or service station attendants or pizza delivery people. One example we do have, though, comes to us from south of the border and the practice is developing some momentum in Canada. Justice for Janitors is an organizing model supported by the Service Em-

ployees International Union and others to raise the profile of issues of concern to janitors in their communities. Community and union organizers work together to put pressure on employers to provide living wages and decent working conditions to janitors employed in a "community," which could be a city or even a neighbourhood.

Through community pressure, employers are forced to recognize the workers as a collective and must deal with them through their representatives. The Justice for Janitors approach, which has caught on in other sectors, has been useful in providing opportunities for formerly disenfranchised workers to negotiate terms and conditions of work with employers or groups of employers.

We need a situation where unionists, like the CEP workers, can exert their total power in the face of a powerful employer like Abitibi-Consolidated. We need a situation where child care workers, pizza delivery people and janitors can bargain not just collectively, but effectively.

This will require radical change. Tinkering with the present system is not enough. Recent changes to the Canada Labour Code brought minor improvements. But under the new Code, a third party still tells workers what unit they will be part of for bargaining purposes. Who is in and who is out is not left to the potential members themselves. So the Code, like the provincial labour laws, continues to make a mockery of the freedom of association. We still have unreasonable restrictions on who we can associate with and who we can have on our side, when we bargain with employers.

The legislation we need will include an obligation on the part of the employers to negotiate with their employees, whatever way the employees decide to organize their union. It will allow for the possibility of sectoral bargaining, regional bargaining, even national bargaining as a right.

Until we achieve these improvements in labour laws, we will have to act as often as possible, as if we already had them. Pattern bargaining in the pulp and paper, automobile and energy industries is one way of doing this.

In sectors like the low paid service sector, we can take a leaf out of the movements such as Justice for Janitors and organize on a community basis. This involves more than relying on the very inadequate rights available under the labour laws. We can also use our clout within the community, our ability to bring people pressure, moral pressure and political pressure into play.

Playing the system to its limits, lobbying for legislative change and using any new tactics that work – these are the strategies for the future.

Bob Hatfield is National Director of Organizing for CEP in Ottawa. David Durning is a National Representative for CEP in Regina.

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Making Contact

Internal union education, the school system, and the media.

by Clare Powell

Daughters and sons of CUPW members at the SFL kids camp learn about solidarity and activism.

When I was a teenager, I had a Roman Catholic friend who claimed his priest had explained how the church maintains loyalty among its subjects.

"Steep the child in church dogma at the youngest possible age," he said, "and that child will remain a Catholic throughout life."

This policy may not be 100 percent foolproof, but it certainly works. Beliefs instilled in childhood - whether religious, moral, political or economic - are often hard to dislodge.

This is a lesson which the labour movement needs to expend more energy on. If children learn about and understand the role which unions play in our society, the better the chance they will maintain that understanding in adulthood.

Lack of early education about unions and working class issues is one reason why labour is viewed with more suspicion or downright hostility in North America than it is in the Scandinavian countries or other parts of Europe.

Because unions have traditionally been recognized as legitimate players in European and Scandinavian society, the education system, the media and even the captains of commerce and industry accept them more routinely.

Leaving aside their obvious duty to achieve the best possible wages, benefits and working conditions for their members, there are four other areas where unions must focus more effort if workers - unionized or not - are to gain the understanding and respect they need and deserve. Those areas are:

* unions themselves (internal education);
* the public education system;
* the media;
* governments.

Government legislation, election of labour candidates and the differing relationships that exist between unions and social democratic parties and governments versus other parties could be the subject of a full article by itself, so that will be left for another time.

Internal Union Education

Because unions often must fight desperately hard just to try to stay afloat in today's corporate-dominated, downsized, global world, they often neglect the education and communication programs necessary to keep their own members strong and well informed. They also spend too little time and effort trying to build links to other, non-organized workers.

In a paper titled *Why Unions Matter*, Elaine Bernard, Executive Director of the Harvard Trade Union Program, has some observations about this

issue. While this was written for a U.S. audience, it is just as relevant for Canadian workers.

"Fighting for democracy in the workplace, and not simply the right to form unions, is vital to restore the social mission of labor and to return unions to their social movement heritage. Viewing labor rights as part of a wider struggle for democracy is essential for the growth of the labor movement today. With organized labor down to only 15 percent of the total work-force, and a dismal 11 percent in the private sector, the vast majority of today's workers have no direct experience with unions. But as citizens, they have a concept of democracy and the rights of citizens. Unfortunately, however, American workers are schooled every day at work to believe that democracy stops at the factory or office door. But democracy is not an extracurricular activity that can be relegated to evenings and weekends. The labor movement is the natural vehicle to lead the struggle for basic democratic rights in the workplace."

To begin this process, of course, it is essential that unions get their own members on side first. For example: workers in the past fought hard for achievements such as the Rand Formula, and compulsory dues checkoffs. Ironically, while these clearly protect the security of the union in the workplace, they can also weaken its functioning.

Officers or stewards may no longer find it essential to maintain regular contact with fellow workers, to personally collect dues, to explain workplace issues or just listen to members' concerns. "New hires" in particular know little about unions and are reluctant or complacent about attending meetings or getting involved.

> Democracy is not an extracurricular activity that can be relegated to evenings and weekends.

A simple but effective educational tool used by some locals is to provide new employees (and periodically, all workers) with a kit containing information such as:

* a brief history of the local and of the national or international parent union;
* names and telephone numbers of the current executive and other officers, stewards and staff representatives;
* dates of regular local meetings and other events;
* a copy of the current collective agreement.

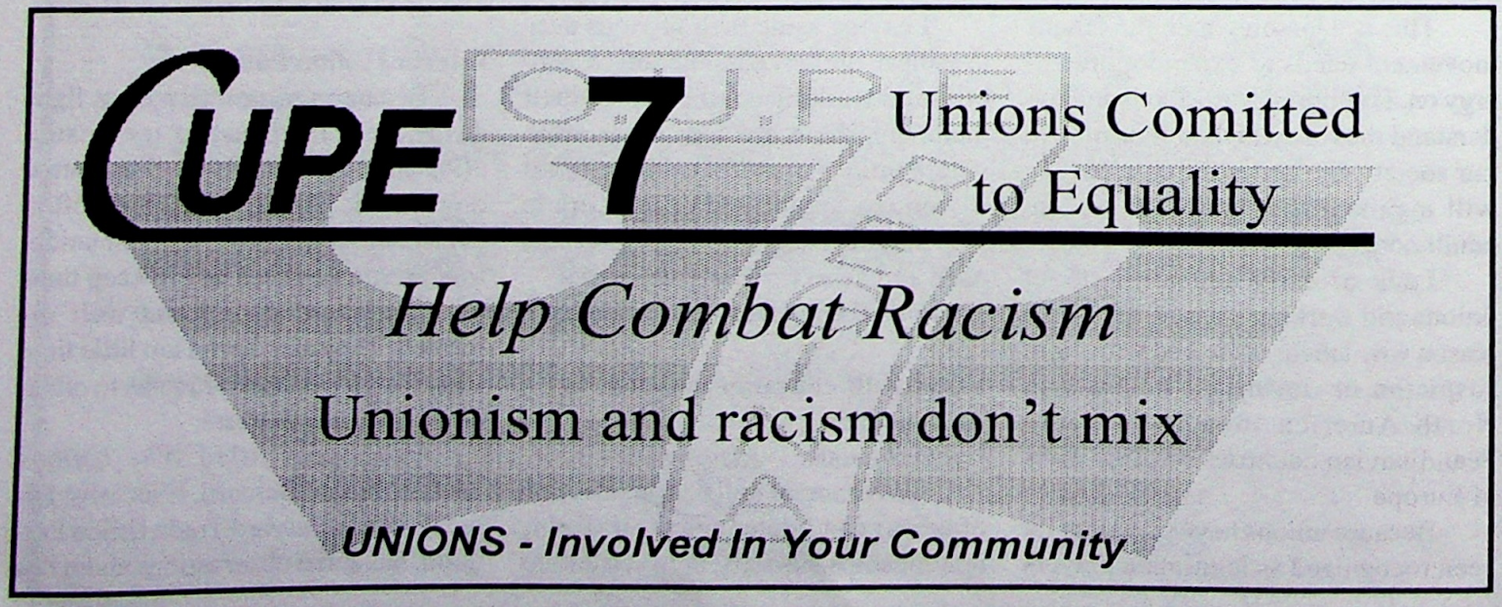
A simple "welcome to the union" from the steward and an introduction to the president and/or other officers will make the new member feel like they belong.

CUPE, the union with which I am most familiar, is currently implementing a program called *Organizing the Organized*, designed to rebuild and revitalize the union by carefully examining the way things are done and making changes that will strengthen locals, executives and rank and file members.

Once members appreciate the true meaning of their union, they will then recognize that it is imperative not only to explore and rebuild from within, but also to reach out to the larger society, to build coalitions, to make links with unorganized workers and other progressives, and to support their struggles too.

Schools and Other Educational Institutions

When I worked for the CCF/NDP in the late sixties and early seventies, I recall that party conventions passed



resolutions urging the government to amend the education curriculum to include courses in schools about the history of the co-operative movement and the labour movement. Neither proposal was carried through, mainly due to the screams of outrage from the business elite about "propaganda" being fed to innocent young minds.

It's time the labour movement revisited these ideas. Skeptics who suggest such efforts are doomed to fail should read Joan Thomson's article about a CUPW high school initiative in Calgary.

There is also an excellent labour studies program at the University of Saskatchewan, but we need to reach children earlier in life.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention another successful project - albeit outside the formal education system, the annual SFL/CLC summer youth camp, which was held for the tenth year this past August. Hundreds of young people, the sons and daughters of trade union members, have not only learned about the democratic nature of unions and how they bargain collectively, but also the importance of equality and solidarity and why they should oppose racism, sexism and homophobia in their own lives and in their future workplaces. Shouldn't these be legitimate topics of study for our provincial school curricula?

The Media

The much touted "freedom of the press" which we allegedly enjoy in our democratic society is fading fast - at least for labour and "left" movements. Not only are the Conrad Blacks and the Rupert Murdochs of the world taking over more and more media outlets from which to espouse their pro-business, right-wing ideology, but a succession of equally right-wing Canadian governments, through deliberate cutting and downsizing, have torn the heart out of our once proud public broadcaster, the CBC. (Could anyone doubt such an outcome when Perrin Beatty, a former Mulroney cabinet minister, was appointed as Corporation president?)

CBC coverage of labour issues has become so bad that many union leaders will tell you their stories are often treated better by the private media - notably television. Some suspect this government gutting is a deliberate effort to make "Mother Corp." so unattractive that its eventual privatization can be achieved with little public outcry.

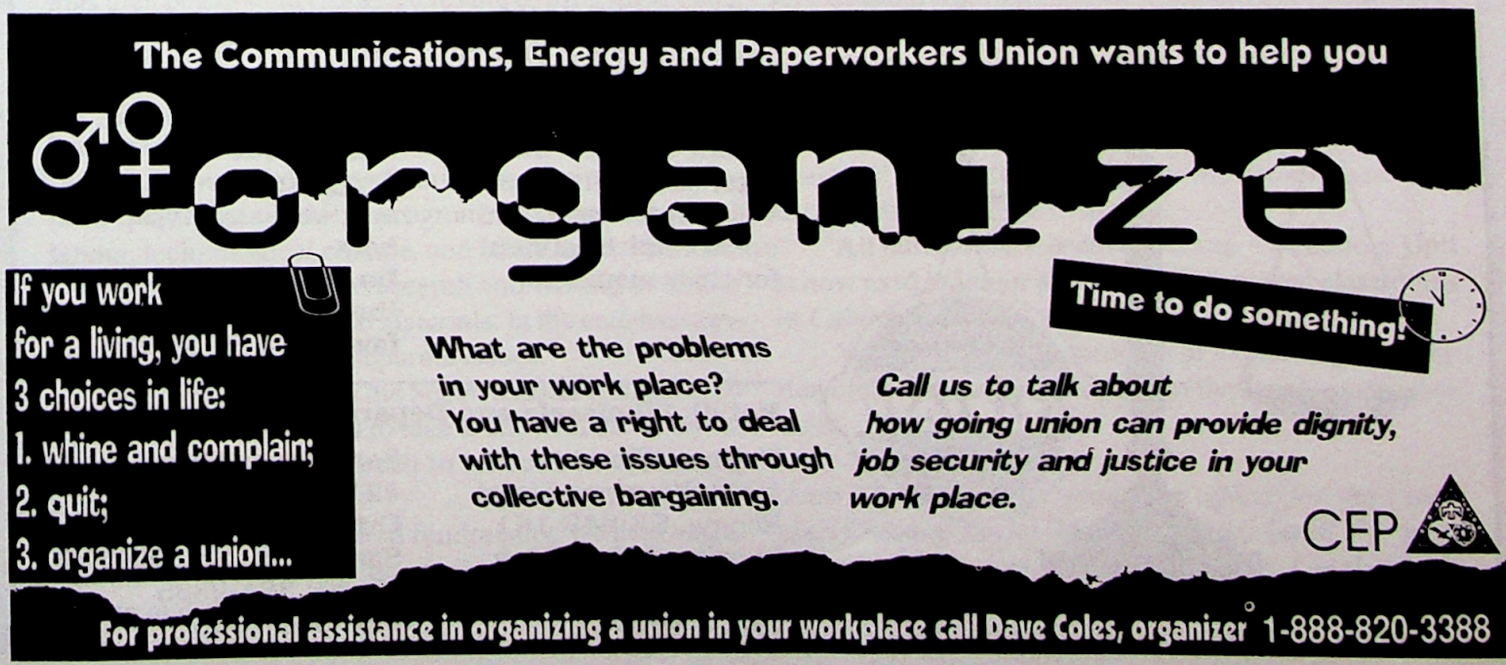
Dozens of examples of poor coverage of labour issues come to mind, but I'll cite only a few.

Virtually no major media outlet employs a full-time "labour" reporter and there certainly are no labour columnists. Stories with a union or labour component often end up on the business page, sharing space with anti-labour, pro-business stories and columns.

When Conrad Black bought up all of Saskatchewan's dailies, there was a sudden influx of right-wing columnists like Clare Hoy, George Jonas, and Andrew Coyne. Certainly there are still progressive viewpoints expressed by the likes of Rosemary Speirs and Tom Ford (Issues Network) but even they seldom touch on issues directly related to the labour movement.

When unions attempt to publicize their issues through news releases or news conferences, the media coverage is often poor or non-existent. Many times, a reporter will make every effort to get an opposing comment from an employer or business to "balance" their story. Interestingly, the same "balance" is often missing when the story has a pro-business slant. And aside from the newscasts, how often are labour issues dealt with by the programmers of that most powerful medium of all - television?

All three TV networks have extensive and special coverage of busi-



ness issues. I am unaware of any current programs that deal with union or labour issues. One such program was the CBC's *Workworld* but it was watered down when the gurus on high used the "balance" argument and inserted pro-business or non-labour guests to square off against or attempt to neutralize the statements of labour spokespersons.

How should labour deal with this issue? Even though I've been a working reporter and have dealt with the media in one form or another for over 45 years, I'm now about to say something blasphemous: don't spend a lot of time on them!

Much more time should be spent getting the message out internally to union members, and externally by going directly to the public through such methods as door-to-door blitzing, handing out leaflets, setting up tables in shopping malls and at fairs and exhibitions, wearing T-shirts and buttons, and holding rallies, conferences and demonstrations.

As with any "rule" there are exceptions:

1. Notify, support and include alternative media (such as *Briarpatch* and *Prairie Dog*) or individual mainstream reporters you know will cover you in a fair manner.
2. Use paid advertising methods, to the extent you can afford them - billboards, newspaper and radio ads. It may grate us to put bucks into the pockets of the very people who often scorn us, but at least we will be assured the message gets out in the way we intended.
3. Use "free" methods whenever possible, such as letters to the editor, radio talk shows, union newsletters and bulletin boards.

Obviously we can't ignore the mainstream media altogether. But let's stop fretting and spending so much time and energy relying on them to relay our message. Let them know what's happening and if they cover us, fine; if not, carry on with the struggle!

Clare Powell is the Communications Representative for the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Saskatchewan.

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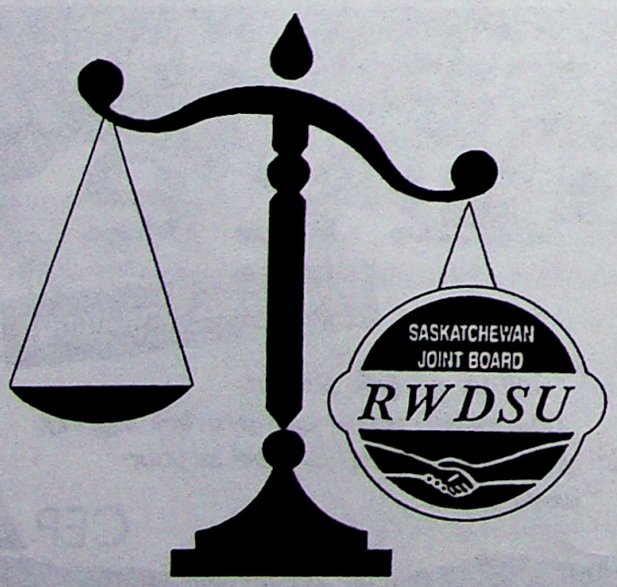

EVERY WORKING WOMAN AND MAN needs someone in their corner. That is the role of unions. Unions represent workers' interests, make sure their voices are heard, and ensure fair treatment for their members.

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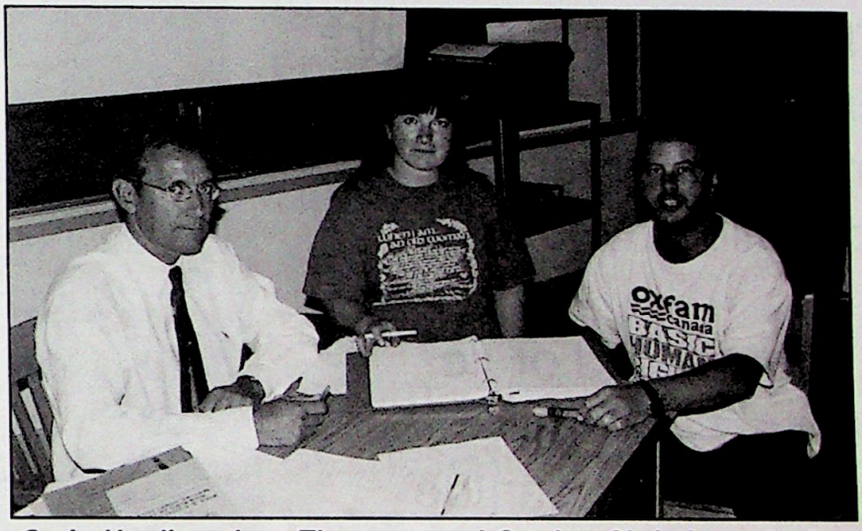
Teaching the Children

How union members got labour's message into high schools in the heartland of Preston Manning and Ralph Klein.

by Joan Thomson



Craig Harding, Joan Thomson and Gordon Christie worked on the curriculum being delivered in Calgary high schools.
photo: John Sweetland

A common complaint often heard from labour is that the public education system fails to address our perspective of history. In 1996, the Calgary Local of CUPW decided to try to change that and reclaim the importance of working class issues in the classroom.

I wrote a letter to the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) in March 1996, expressing this concern and asking to be involved in developing appropriate classroom material. We didn't harbour any unrealistic expectations. We fully expected the letter to remain unanswered.

You can imagine our surprise when the Board enthusiastically welcomed our proposal. A series of meetings then began with Gordon Christie of the Calgary and District Labour Council and myself presenting labour issues to the Social Studies Department of the CBE.

We identified a number of issues which could prove beneficial to high school students such as labour history, famous labour leaders, anti-union government legislation, quality of worklife programs, harassment, child labour, technological change, and international labour.

We began intensive research and writing of lesson plans, along with resource materials. In the end, we completed 54 lessons on 12 separate issues.

We then approached the Social Studies Council with our project. They agreed to take it on, with the intent of writing a balanced approach to labour history, for the first time ever.

Since this also required fundraising, we then began that phase of our work. We mailed over 200 letters to unions and social coalition partners, asking for donations. I'm proud to say these requests did not fall on deaf ears. We raised $12,000 - enough to meet the budget for five teachers working over the summer of 1997, for word processing, reprinting materials, desk top publishing and final printing and binding.

The Canadian Labour Congress and the Alberta Federation of Labour also assisted us and the Alberta Teachers' Association eagerly introduced the Labour Unit to the provincial government.

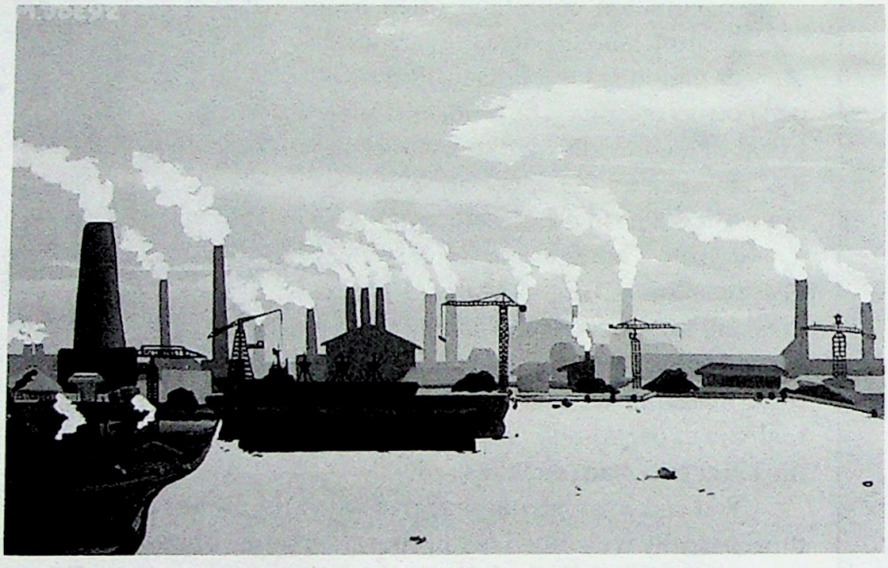
All hurdles have been overcome. The Labour Unit is now used in junior and senior high school classrooms in Calgary.

We are now in the process of expanding distribution of the Labour Unit throughout the four western provinces.

Joan Thomson is the education officer for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers Calgary Local. For more information contact the CUPW Calgary Local at (403) 295-2556.

Activist Art

There is a sickness in this land
And all around the world
That no doctor can cure
Endemic as the blood of every
man that breathes
It's called hypocrisy



A special kind of lie
Cloaked in a smile
Like friendly cyanide
Friendly poison
forked tongues aglow
As people disappear
With God's endorsement

Common as bacteria
At a White House banquet
It's called hypocrisy

Fertilized in fear
Transmitted as a gesture
Or spoken as a sermon
It's called hypocrisy

I'll probably never think
a thought
That has not been thought
And rethought
By a thousand wiser women

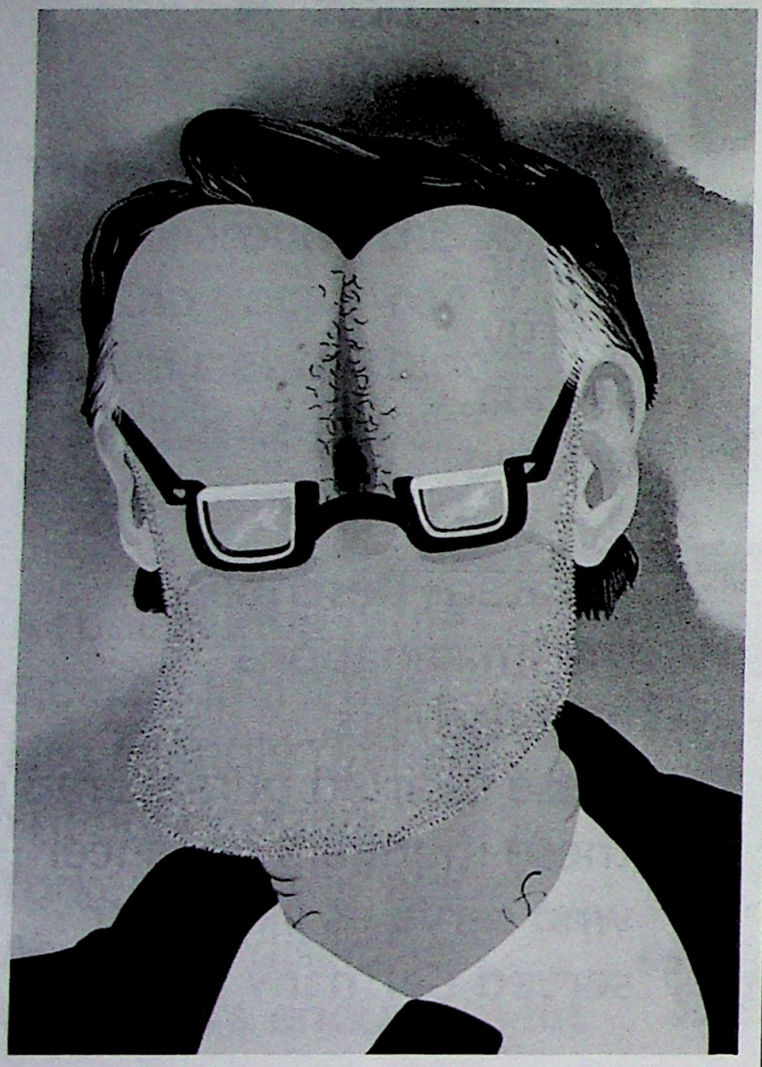
The fan fans
The clock ticks
The lies continue
A.E.C.L.

Atomic
Energy
Canada
Limited

"Limited" describes
the imaginations
of these liars
these salaried bureaucrats
these mongers of cancer
who serve us like Hitler
served Germany

The poetry & paintings of Mendelson Joe

Mendelson Joe muses on an ex-Prime Minister



painting & poetry: Mendelson Joe

Brian Mulroney
Our elected leader
Has that special power
Especially when he smiles
To make me feel
Like leeches are alive
Sucking inside
The pathetic life
That once was Canada

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DROP IN SOON!

Say what?

"THEY MUST BE PLANNING TO WORK US TO DEATH. I HEARD THEY'RE CANCELING OUR LIFE INSURANCE PLAN."

NO SYMPATHY

"Let's get him in here, so I can get all the work out of him I can before he dies on me."

- an assistant operations manager at Branch Motor Express in Milton, Pennsylvania, after learning that a worker had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

WHAT A BARGAIN

"You can't overpay a great executive. Don't you think I'm a bargain?"

- Al Dunlap, Sunbeam chairperson and CEO, a few days before he gave himself a raise in March 1998, doubling his salary and stock-option package to US$70 million. Dunlap, whose nickname is "Chainsaw Al," had previously axed half of Sunbeam's 12,000-person work-force and closed 18 of its 26 factories and 37 of its 61 warehouses.

NOT ANTI-UNION?

McDonald's "is not anti-union. McDonald's is pro-employee. Ultimately, the choice [to unionize] is one that rests with employees and McDonald's will respect whatever choice they make."

- Barbara Thompson, McDonald's director of marketing for Quebec, after the corporation had opposed Teamsters union attempts to organize McDonald's workers in Quebec.

"I keep having this nightmare that I'm one of my own employees."

CAVE IN?

"Ottawa has been picking up the tab on freeloading feminist ideology since the 1960s, so there's every reason to be concerned that the government is going to cave in again."

- Terence Corcoran, Globe and Mail *Columnist, July 31, 1998. Corcoran was speculating that the federal government would "cave in" on pay equity and not appeal a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling. The Liberal government appealed the ruling which supported the Public Service Alliance of Canada's position that the feds owed its members approximately $4 billion.*

CHAINSAW AXED

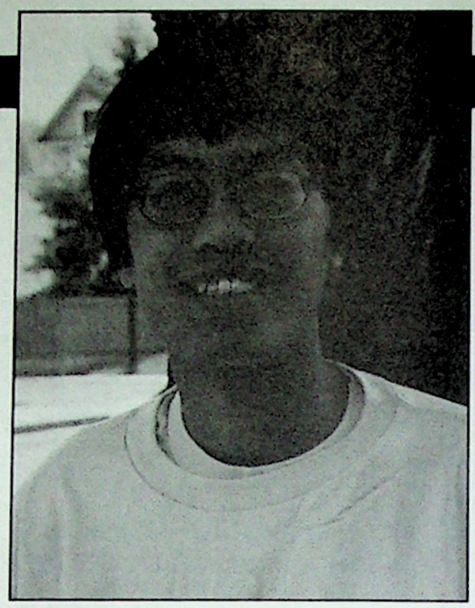
"If you do the job, you should be well paid. If you don't do the job, you should not only lose your incentives, you should lose your job."

- Al Dunlap, from his book, "Mean Business". On June 15, 1998, Dunlap was fired from Sunbeam after company stock hit a new 52-week low on the stock market, losing 50 percent of its value in two months. Dunlap reportedly had tears in his eyes as he talked about how people are taking pleasure in him being fired.

Unions at the Crossroads

The fate of the union movement hangs in the balance.

by Victor Lau



The future of trade unionism is at an historic moment. As we approach the new century, there seem to be two choices that the world can choose to take. Big business in general seems to want to roll back all of the previous gains that trade unionists have achieved over the years and even eliminate the legal right for people to organize into unions. The trade union movement is only recently realizing that there are very few large industrial factories or businesses left to organize and are beginning to aggressively sign up new members in the service industry, which are predominantly part-time.

What is the future of trade unions? Here in Canada about one-third of our entire work-force is unionized. Despite this high level, many workers seem ill at ease to fully support their union. Even as unions grow by organizing new and younger members, the older membership seems to be hesitating over taking on big business. Perhaps one of the reasons is that only recently have North American unions begun to seriously fight hard to win any gains at the bargaining table. In the past most gains came without a strike and most union members have never had to walk on the picket line. Nowadays, governments of all political stripes and many large businesses are unwilling to budge on union concerns unless they are forced to do so.

If the trade union movement is going to thrive and prosper, it must take some radical new steps. One of the things they must do is to begin to bargain not only on the concerns of their own members, but instead they must look to larger world concerns. Some would call this social unionism. I would call it a smart move.

As big business gets larger and more powerful, they are expanding their capitalist empire all over the world. When they cannot find compliant workers to easily exploit in one country, they threaten to shut down and even move to another country.

For the workers, the choice is either take outrageous pay cuts or face unemployment. In order to counter this, there needs to be strict international labour standards imposed on all countries. The International Labour Organization has the right idea when they talk about imposing minimum labour rights in all trade agreements and national laws of all countries. In this way, businesses that try to exploit workers have nowhere to run to. Add to that the idea of international solidarity, where a union in one country will strike to support another union in another country, and you can see how businesses would tremble.

Beyond this though, there still need to be changes made in all union structures in order to restore the faith of the rank and file membership. Constitutional amendments in union constitutions must allow for greater member participation and democratic decision making. The single biggest step that any union can take to restore membership support is to restructure the pay scales of union representatives and presidents. Many members of any union feel that the salaries of their reps are out of line, considering that very few ordinary members make that kind of pay, especially not the part-timers. Without this kind of reform, the union leadership will have a hard time convincing ordinary members to stay loyal to the union cause.

So, are there any other options on the horizon? One option that I feel is very powerful and compelling is the idea of worker ownership. This idea would solve both the dilemma of undemocratic unions and greed-driven businesses. By offering workers a direct say and control over their own working conditions, you would instill a sense of true responsibility in the work-force. Businesses owned and controlled by workers would more likely be attentive to community concerns, not just the bottom line. Of course, this is not about to happen overnight.

It will take much discussion and debate on where workers see themselves in the future before worker-owned businesses can truly expand. Meanwhile, unions will go on growing and thriving as long as there are workplace abuses that employers seem determined to carry on with.

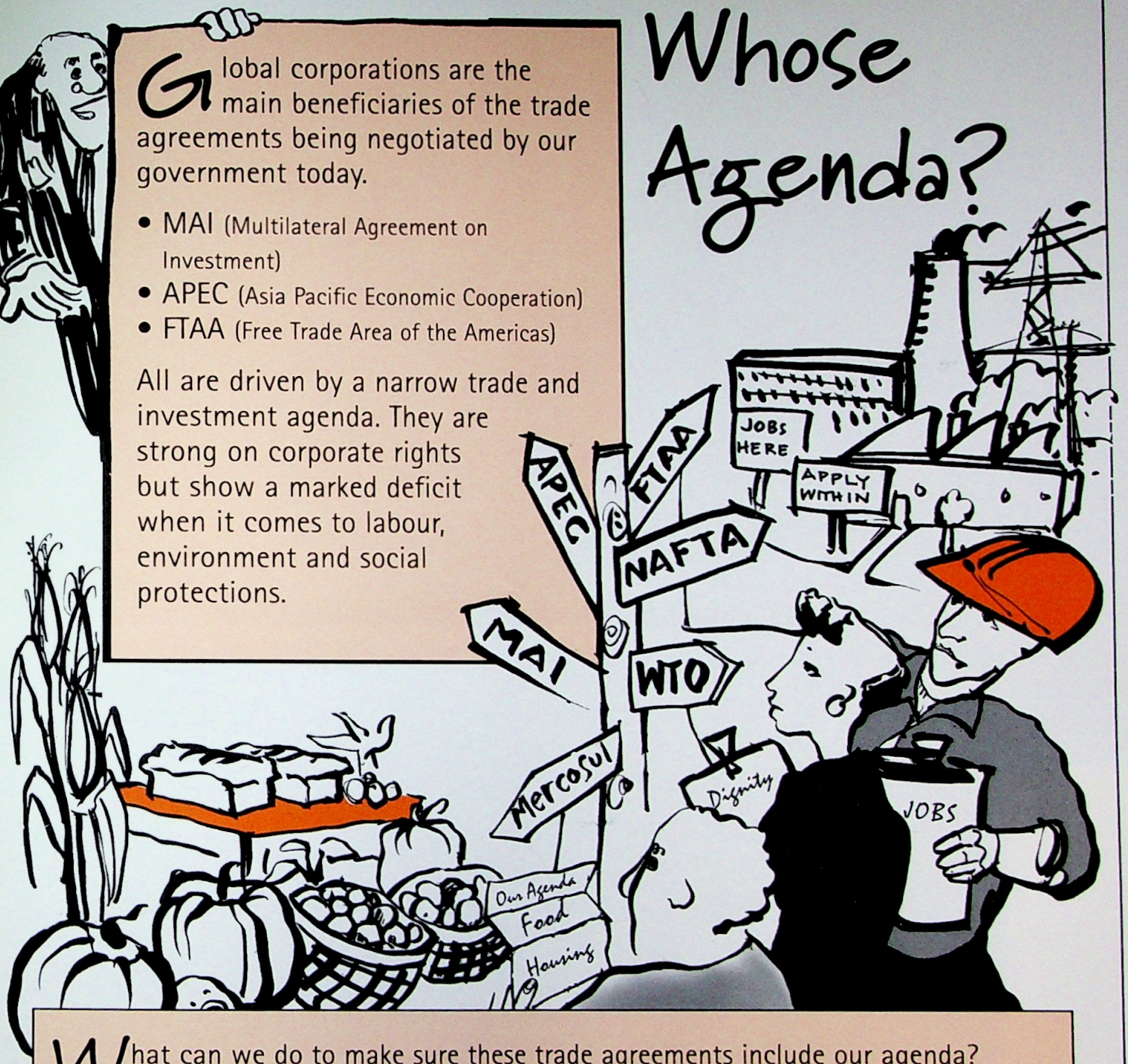
Victor Lau is the former president of the Regina and District Labour Council.

Whose Agenda?

Global corporations are the main beneficiaries of the trade agreements being negotiated by our government today.

- MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment)
- APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation)
- FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas)

All are driven by a narrow trade and investment agenda. They are strong on corporate rights but show a marked deficit when it comes to labour, environment and social protections.



What can we do to make sure these trade agreements include our agenda? Get informed! Become active in organizations fighting to put labour, environment and social rights on the negotiating table. There are alternatives to competitive globalization.

"We are convinced that the Americas does not need free trade. It needs fair trade, regulated investment and a conscious consumer strategy..."

Final Declaration, Peoples Summit of the Americas
Santiago, Chile, April 1998

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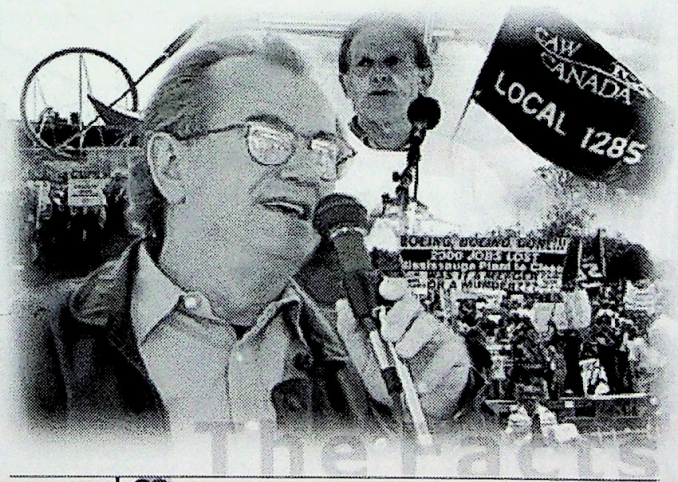

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